

SYNERGY

Volume 4: No.1

Exploring the Boundaries of Cinema and Entertainment

DOCTOR • WHO



CONTENTS

Volume 4 No.1
Dr.Who & Science Fiction

Editorial
Information
Giveaways
News

FEATURES

Doctor Who Special:

Overview
History
Theme Music
The Doctors
Other Doctors (Stage, Audio etc)
Regeneration
The Companions
Captain Jack
Sexuality and Doctor Who
Adversaries of the Doctor
Reflections on the Revival of Doctor Who
(2005 Onwards)
Inside the Tardis
Tom Baker



REVIEWS

Books and Print
Comedy
Cult Cinema
Erotica
World Cinema
Thinking Time



Images of Doctor © BBC

SYNERGY

Publisher/Editor-In-Chief: Robert Black
Managing Editor: Bob Estreich
Webmaster/Designer: Synergy Team
Proof Reader: Fiona Johns
Contributing Reviewers: Robert Black,
Bob Estreich, Michelle Taylor, Jeremy
Kong, Renata Kong & various freelance
reviewers.

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SYNERGY MAGAZINE
PO Box 492
Armidale NSW 2350
Australia

Web
<http://www.synergy-magazine.com>

Emails
editor@synergy-magazine.com

Synergy Magazine reviews DVDs from all regions. The **R** description with each title advises the Region.

1 = USA
2 = UK
3 = Asia
4 = Australia
0 = All region.

DVD-R

DVD-R refers to titles which have not been formally released on DVD but release via specialty DVD firms. NTSC or PAL is used with the ALL REGION CODE and refers to the TV format.

Blu Ray

We review Blu Rays from all regions; we will clearly list the region (or region free) on each disc.

The best reference site for Blu Ray is <http://www.blu-ray.com>. It includes lots of details about Blu Ray releases and is one of the only reliable sources for information on which Blu

Ray releases are ALL REGION.

For Adult titles, we include an extra reference **(E)** for explicit, **(M)** for mature. Adult content within mainstream titles will be mentioned as appropriate.

DD refers to Digital Download with the format of the download following in brackets.

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Features, articles, news and competitions only appear in the digital and print editions.

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Welcome to the first issue of Synergy for 2011.

In this issue we have decided to do something a bit different.

Since Doctor Who has gone through such an incredible revival in recent times we have decided to devote the features on this issue to the Doctor Who phenomenon. We have created quite an exhaustive history with all manner of interesting and intriguing facts as well as lots of reviews. It covers from the very first Doctor Who episode through to the most recent with specials on The Doctors, Companions, Enemies even a photo special on the changing face of the Tardis.

At the same time we have not forgotten reviews

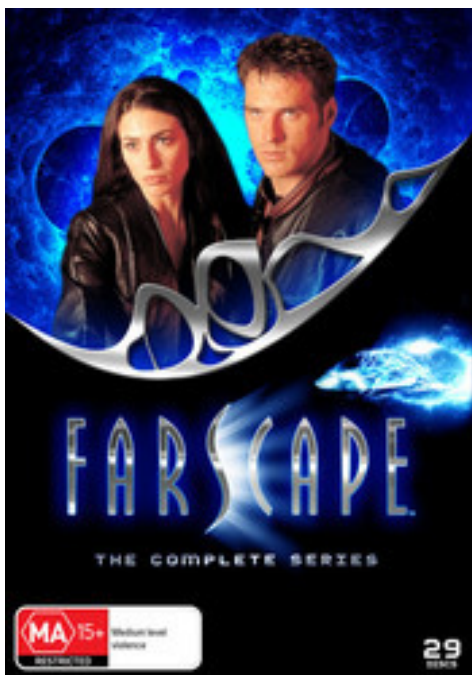


and this issue is packed with lots of them from erotica to documentaries, horror to cult cinema. It has been fascinating to note the development of documentaries in the mainstream market. Documentaries have moved from being peripheral educational programs to be centre stage with many documentaries competing with major releases for cinema time.

Since documentaries have become such a major aspect of the market our next issue will be special Thinking Time ! Special edition covering all aspects of the Documentary. We have a comprehensive history of documentary cinema as well as lots of reviews.

At the same time this is Synergy and it is not all mainstream, we are also covering exploitation and Mondo documentaries so be prepared for anything !

**New Years Greetings
Synergy Team**



Farscape Beyond Home Entertainment

Astronaut John Crichton assumes he'll be home in time for dinner. But a freak accident during an experimental space mission catapults him across a thousand galaxies.

Suddenly, he's trapped among alien creatures wielding deadly technology in a battle that 20th century sci-fi pop culture never prepared him for. Hunted by a merciless military race, Crichton begins his quest for home from a galaxy far, far away...

So begins the epic adventure Farscape, the groundbreaking award-winning sci-fi production that has become a sci-fi favourite around the world. A fusion of live action, state-of-the-art puppetry, prosthetics and CGI, Farscape features mind-boggling alien life forms, dazzling special effects, edge-of-your-seat thrills, irreverent humour and unforgettable characters—all brought to life by the creative minds at Jim Henson's Creature Shop.

Extras include Farscape Undressed: the Home Video Premiere of the Rarely-Seen, Long-Sought-After Behind-the-Scenes Special, Three Archival Documentaries: In the Beginning: A Look Back with Brian Henson, Making of.

Beyond Home Entertainment has made available a set to giveaway.

If you want a chance to win send an email to promotions@synergy-magazine.com with Farscape in the subject.

Please include your name and postal address in the body of the email.

This competition is open to Australian residents only.

Spartacus: Blood and Sand Series 1 UNCUT Starz

Special Features:

Episode Audio Commentary's

Spartacus: Blood And Sand - Behind The Scenes

Spartacus: Battle Royale

Gladiator Boot Camp

Grime And Punishment

Andy Gets Plastered

Legend Re-Imagined

Oh, Those Randy Romans

Shooting Green: The Shadow Of Death

Exposing Your Ludus

Spartacus "Vengeance" Trailer Special Features:

Episode Audio Commentary's

Spartacus: Blood And Sand - Behind The Scenes

Spartacus: Battle Royale

Gladiator Boot Camp

Grime And Punishment

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Shooting Green: The Shadow Of Death

Exposing Your Ludus

Spartacus "Vengeance" Trailer

Starz has made available a set to giveaway.

If you want a chance to win send an email to promotions@synergy-magazine.com with Spartacus in the subject.

Please include your name and postal address in the body of the email.





Razer, the world's leading manufacturer of high-end precision gaming and lifestyle peripherals, is pleased to announce, in collaboration with Disney Consumer Products (DCP), the *TRON:Legacy* -themed *TRON*® Gaming Keyboard Designed by Razer™, *TRON*® Gaming Mouse Designed by Razer™, and the exclusive bundle with *TRON*® Gaming Mouse and Mouse Mat Designed by Razer™ all incorporating the distinctive blue glow and custom features inspired by the upcoming Disney film *TRON: Legacy*, releasing Dec. 17, 2010 in Disney Digital 3D™ and IMAX® 3D, and compatible with *TRON: Evolution* the video game. Together with Disney, Razer is offering gamers and *TRON* fans alike a set of definitive gaming peripherals to get the true *TRON* experience.

"We are all extremely excited about our collaboration with Disney on a line of high-end gaming peripherals inspired by the upcoming film Tron: Legacy," said Robert "Razerguy" Krakoff, president, Razer USA. *"Razer is known for our*

highly detailed finishes and lighting effects, so as soon as we viewed footage from Tron: Legacy, we were immediately inspired. Then, we started working to take it to the next level, as only Razer can, with a keyboard and mouse that has digitized sound effects and lighting built into it for the ultimate gaming experience."

Each *TRON: Legacy* product Designed by Razer™ features a luminescent blue glow that is reminiscent of the film aesthetic. Whether it's the keyboard with a detachable modular keypad or the illuminated mouse, gamers will feel as if they've been enveloped by the *TRON* universe and pulled into a digital world.

The Tron Bundle: Gaming Mouse and Mat Designed by Razer

Besides enjoying light alerts triggered by in-game actions on an interactive gaming mouse, gamers can now add the gaming mouse mat that features a bio-luminescent tracking glow trail as they swipe their mouse across the smooth, hard surface. The *Tron* gaming mouse mat and mouse bundle is the definitive suite for gamers who want the *Tron* edge. The gaming mouse mat is the perfect peripheral to complement the gaming mouse, as it's made for high sensitivity gaming mice and offers the utmost tracking precision.

Product Features:

TRON: Legacy Inspired Theme
High Precision Tracking Surface
Mouse Mat with Bioluminescent Tracking Glow Trail

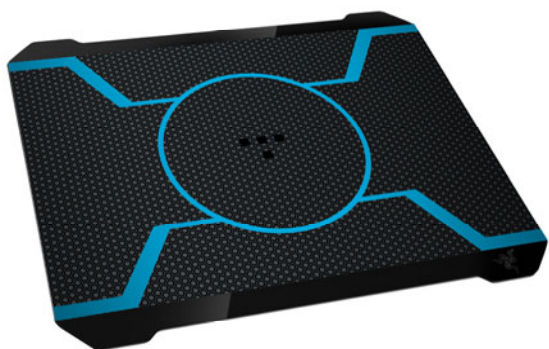
Retails for AU\$179.95

If you want a chance to win send an email to promotions@synergy-magazine.com with Tron in the subject.

Please include your name and postal address in the body of the email.

This competition is open to Australian residents only.

Other products available in the range include a *Tron Gaming Keyboard*. The *Tron Gaming Mouse* is only available in Australia with the *Tron Mousepad*.



ANIMAL KINGDOM SWEEPS THE BOARD at the 2010 SAMSUNG MOBILE AFI AWARDS.

MELBOURNE, Monday, 13 December 2010: ANIMAL KINGDOM fever has swept the 2010 Samsung Mobile AFI Awards ceremony. The year's most talked about film triumphed - receiving ten awards from a record total of eighteen nominations.



Accepting her award for 'Best Actress', Jacki Weaver gave a show-stealing speech via video-link from Sydney, stating that after such a long career in the industry "...it's wonderful to be reassured that you haven't been barking up the wrong tree for 48 years." In delivering a heartfelt thanks to her husband, Weaver went on to state "In fact, I'd like to thank everyone I ever married!"

In news announced earlier today, the Los Angeles Film Critics Association presented the prestigious 'Best Supporting Actress' award to Weaver at the 36th annual awards ceremony - held last night in Los Angeles. The award is yet another prominent accolade for Weaver on the campaign trail to the 2011 Oscars®, who was also awarded the illustrious 'Best Supporting Actress' award by the National Board of Review earlier in the month.

The complete list of AFI Awards for ANIMAL KINGDOM is as follows.

Samsung Mobile Award for Best Film – ANIMAL KINGDOM

AFI Award for Best Direction – David Michôd

AFI Award for Best Original Screenplay – ANIMAL KINGDOM, David Michôd

AFI Award for Best Lead Actor – Ben Mendelsohn

AFI Award for Best Lead Actress – Jacki Weaver

AFI Award for Best Supporting Actor – Joel Edgerton

Reader's Choice Award – ANIMAL KINGDOM

AFI Members' Choice Award – ANIMAL KINGDOM

AFI Award for Best Editing – ANIMAL KINGDOM, Luke Doolan

AFI Award for Best Original Music Score – ANIMAL KINGDOM. Antony Partos, Sam Petty

ANIMAL KINGDOM Producer, Liz Watts said: "We are so very, very thrilled by the wins over the weekend at the AFIs - its topped an amazing year for the film and for everyone who has contributed to it. With Jacki also getting the nod from the LA Film Critics this morning, it really has been an incredible few days. Congratulations to everyone involved with Animal Kingdom!"

Paul Wiegard, Managing Director, Madman Entertainment adds: "It has been a wonderful experience - from the first day of production to winning International praise at Sundance - then through a successful domestic release. Without a doubt, Animal Kingdom will become a reference film for years to come."

Several other Madman and SBS DVD releases also picked up prestigious awards across the Saturday evening ceremony and the Friday night Industry Awards – including 'Best Children's Television Animation' for dirtgirlworld, 'Best Short Animation' for THE LOST THING, and 'Best Documentary Series' for LIBERAL RULE: THE POLITICS THAT CHANGED AUSTRALIA.

The full list of awards is as follows:

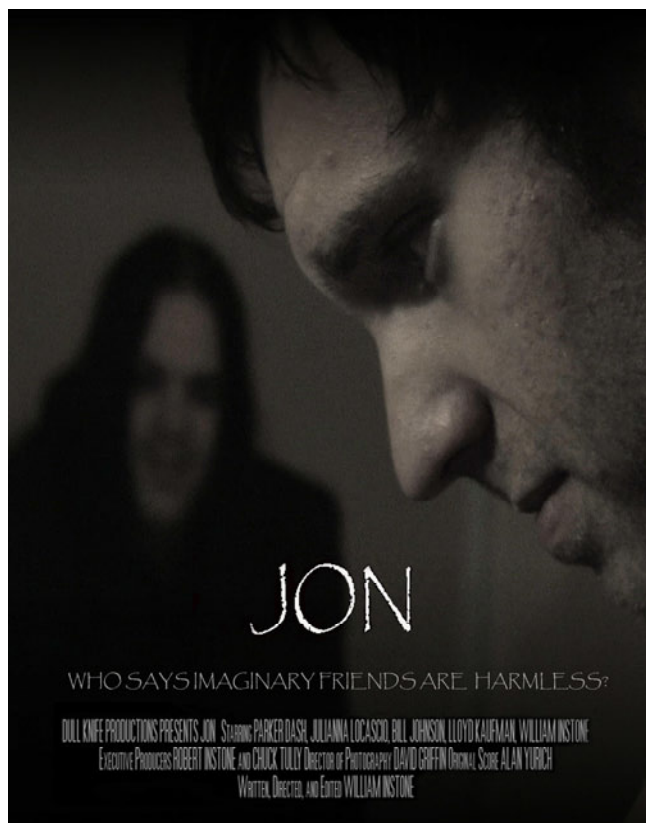
AFI Award for Best Screenplay in Television – WILFRED II

AFI Award for Best Guest or Supporting Actor in a Television Drama – Deborah Mailman, OFF-SPRING.

AFI Award for Best Children's Television Animation – dirtgirlworld

AFI Award for Best Documentary Series – LIBERAL RULE: THE POLITICS THAT CHANGED AUSTRALIA

AFI Award for Best Short Animation – THE LOST THING



Jon

Who says imaginary friends are harmless?

Jon Sloan, a socially challenged computer engineer doesn't have any luck with the ladies. A desperate loner looking for love, Jon finds himself the constant victim of rejection from the local bar girls. In a state of depression Jon questions his sanity as he begins seeing a large man in black through out his daily life that he recognizes, but can't place who the man is.

After an online date goes wrong, Jon finds himself thrust into a world of darkness when the

man in black turns out to be Blackie; Jon's sociopath, childhood imaginary friend that has returned to his life to taunt and entice him to live out a life of lust and murder.

Jon is a Dark Drama about a man's struggle to deal with who he is, and what he will become.

Directed and written by William Instone, also a member of hard rock band BlyndfoldMary. Starring Parker Dash as Jon and the director William Instone himself as Blackie, his imaginary friend. Also appearing in the film is Bill Johnson (Leatherface in *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*), Lloyd Kaufman, Simon Day (**Run Fatboy Run**), Kim S nderholm (*Tour de Force*, *Little Big Boy*) as a crazy TV evangelist and a lot, lot more.

Director's Statement

For my debut film I wanted to make something that felt real to me. I knew I wanted to do a horror film, but didn't want to do the same old psycho killer in woods hacking up teen aged kids. Jon came to like when I recalled an even in my life when my real life friend JON met a drag queen at a bar and some of the online dating stories I had heard about. While driving to work one morning I came up with the basic idea of the story, 3 days later the script was written. It was important to me to make my characters as real as possible, almost every character in this story I modeled after real people I have known through out my life, in the end I feel strongly that this approach to the writing really paid off and made it very easy for my actors to embrace their character and breath life into them.

Making Jon has been a very enjoyable learning experience. Shot in guerrilla style; the film was made with a 2 man crew and limited budget. This truly was film school by doing.

I not only learned what to do, but I learned what not to do and that is something that you only learn by doing it. I'm very proud of what I created and hope that others will enjoy watching it as much as I enjoyed making it.

imdb info: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1592557/>

Official 2011 Trailer: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CdX0o8_rKl4





It is generally believed that Generation X began in 1963 and this period marked a great interest in science and society. It was the heyday of the paperback book, a large number of which were of the science fiction genre. In 1966 the Nebula Awards began and science fiction books regularly hit the best-seller list.

Early 1962 Eric Maschwitz, Assistant to the Controller of Programmes at BBC Television asked Donald Wilson of the Script Department to take a look at the possibility of producing a major science fiction series. A report was prepared by Alice Frick and Donald Bull with a follow-up report made by Frick and John Baybon in July. This report was more specific and advised that time travel would be a concept worth exploring. Time Travel was a hot concept in the Fifties and Sixties explored in many science fiction novels.

In December 1962 Canadian-born Sydney Newman arrived at BBC Television as the new Head of Drama. Newman brought a new enthusiasm to the BBC. He was an avid science fiction fan and when made aware of the ideas that the script department had for a new series jumped at the opportunity. At the same time an opening was available in the Saturday evening schedule and hence it was suggested a new teen based sci fi show could be developed. Meetings were held with Wilson, Braybon, Frick and another BBC staff writer, C. E. 'Bunny' Webber.

Wilson and Webber primarily developed the format of the programme and its initial cast of characters. The first formal document was written by

Wilson, Webber and Newman. It was Sydney Newman who had the amazing idea of a time machine which was larger on the inside than the outside and the concept of the Doctor, he also chose the name Doctor Who.

Verity Lambert and story editor David Whitaker took over as co-ordinators of the show with Donald Wilson as producer. Writer Anthony Coburn also contributed, writing the first episode from a draft initially prepared by Webber. It was Wilson who came up with the innovative visual cue that the TARDIS should look like a police box. The name TARDIS was created as an acronym for Time And Relative Dimensions In Space.

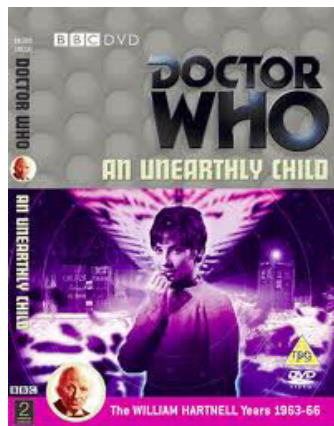
Looking back, one of the strangest aspects of the story of Doctor Who is that it was originally



planned as an educational series. The concept was that the TARDIS would transform into an object representing the given period under exploration. A column from ancient Greece, a Mayan statue etc). This was explained as occurring due to the unique electronics of the TARDIS called the "Chameleon Circuit". It became clear that changing the TARDIS every program would be way outside the budget of this new show. So it was suggested that the Chameleon Circuit had malfunctioned and the TARDIS became locked in a 1950's telephone box design.

Doctor Who first made it to air on BBC Television at 5:15 pm 23rd November 1963.

The first episode was *An Unearthly Child*, starring the first incarnation of the Doctor, played by character actor William Hartnell. Supporting him were William Russell and Jacqueline Hill as Ian Chesterton and Barbara Wright, respectively, and Carole Ann Ford as the Doctor's granddaughter, Susan Foreman. This group would form the core cast of the series throughout its first two seasons.



The series was developed to appeal to a general family audience with a focus on younger viewers. The BBC Serials division produced it for 26 series on BBC One. Many well respected actors appeared on the show in guest roles and cameos. While it became somewhat of a BBC institution it also engendered controversy. Just like most television in the Sixties and Seventies it began to become more adult in its content and explore more mature themes. It increased its quotient of violence and gore, even though this still would be considered mild compared to the cinema of the period.

For example, in Season Eight, Episodes 55-59 *The Terror of the Autons* (1971) over a series of four episodes we have The Master up to all sorts of shenanigans. There are images murderous plastic dolls, a living chair that suffocates, daffodils killing unsuspecting victims and a po-



licemen who is not what he seems, but is really an Auton.

These sort of images brought out the moral crusaders, puritans and kooks and Mary Whitehouse repeatedly demanded changes to the show. Strangely such demands simply increased viewership. It seems kids loved to be scared.

Sadly in 1989 the show seemed to be losing viewers so production stopped after series 26. The fact that the quality of the script writing had fallen and production values lowered certainly didn't help.



The BBC had hoped to find an independent company to take over the series. While this did not occur it did lead to the Doctor Who television film in 1996. This was a co-production with Universal with the hope of creating a new series of Doctor Who for the American market. It introduced Paul McGann as the eighth doctor. While well liked in the UK it did not go down well in the US and hence an American series never saw the light of day.

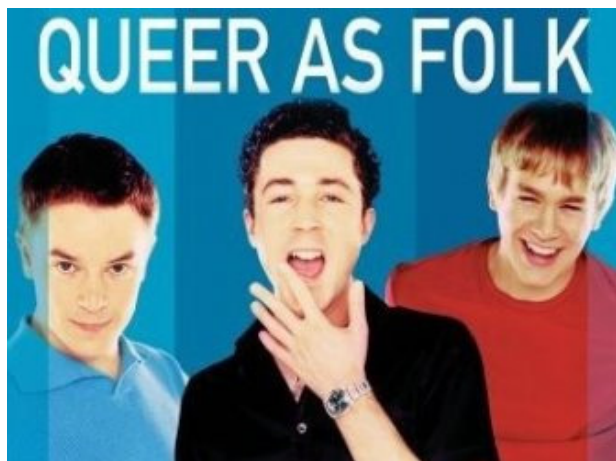
Doctor Who is listed in Guinness World Records as the longest-running science fiction television show in the world and as the "most successful" science fiction series of all time, in terms of its overall broadcast ratings, DVD and book sales, of course, downloads. Awards have

included the BAFTA Award for Best Drama Series in 2006, and five consecutive wins at the National Television Awards since 2005, in the Drama category.



This brings us to the new series of Doctor Who. While novels, audio books and comics continued to explore new plots. It wasn't until 2003 that the BBC announced a new series. The executive producers of the new incarnation of the series were writer Russell T Davies who had made his name with the controversial series *Queer as Folk* and BBC Cymru Wales Head of Drama Julie Gardner. Russell T Davies was an interesting and controversial choice. *Queer as Folk* had been an extremely in your face gay show with an open and explicit portrayal of sex and while receiving lots of praise had also been censored in many countries in the world. In Australia it was cut for release. This was followed by *Bob and Rose* based on a gay friend who married a woman and fathered a child.

Davies injects a different sort of energy into the programs he directs, exploring the variations of human emotion and sexuality; he continued to do so with both *Doctor Who* and *Torchwood*.



The first episode of the new series was Rose, broadcast on BBC One on 25th March 2005. Series have continued to be made. In 2009 due to commitments held by David Tennant, four specials were made. Series five began in 2010 and marked Russell T Davies leaving the Doctor in the hands of Steven Moffat.

The Doctor Who Theme Music

The Doctor Who theme music is one of the most readily identified pieces of electronic music ever recorded. It was composed by Australian Ron Grainer (who also wrote the music for the ITV series *The Prisoner* and for the film *The Omega Man*). The tune remained in use for eighteen years with only minor changes.



The score was handed to the BBC's Radiophonics Workshop for realisation. At this time there were no synthesisers or sequencers available so each note was laboriously generated by an oscillator and saved to tape and a limited range of techniques used to modify the sound. A note could be played backwards, put through a Ring Modulator (to make it "echo") or otherwise modified. The notes were then cut and spliced to make up a single track audio tape of each part of the theme. The individual tracks were then played back on a bank of carefully synchronised tape recorders and recorded onto a master machine (no multitrack tape recorders in those days either).

The work was given to Delia Derbyshire in the Radiophonics Workshop. On hearing the finished work Grainer is supposed to have said "Did I really write that?". He was so impressed that he offered to split the royalties with her, but the BBC would have none of that. Delia was just a staff technician and they received no credit for their work except for a mention of the Radiophonics Workshop.

The theme was so good that only a few changes were made over the years. One of the first,

for instance, was a slight strengthening of the bass line. I feel that this is still one of the best versions. The same driving bass line and haunting high melody



served well for many years. Even with the availability of synthesisers little was done to change the basic theme and it wasn't until 2002 that the theme was even converted to stereo using Delia Derbyshire's original masters.

From 1970 the first part of the theme was used in a briefer form to introduce each episode and the full theme used at the end to accommodate the ever-growing credits. Phrases of the theme were duplicated as needed to extend the theme, added to the end of the credits and a electronic sliding-downscale "shriek" was introduced at the cliffhanger moment at the end of each episode to begin the theme.

With the introduction of synthesisers an attempt was made in the 1960s to modernise the theme. Although the new version perhaps sounded a little more up to date it lost the haunting feel of the original and just sounded like bland synthesiser music. . Another try was made by Dominic Glynn in 1986, but it so lost the feel of the original that it only lasted one season. Successive attempts were no more successful.

In 2005 the series was revived following a long break. A new version of the theme was scored for the BBC National Orchestra of Wales. It restored many of the original motifs but I feel it falls flat because it was well, just too orchestral. Although beautifully played it lost the raw, eerie feeling and sounded a little more like elevator music.



The Doctors

First Doctor

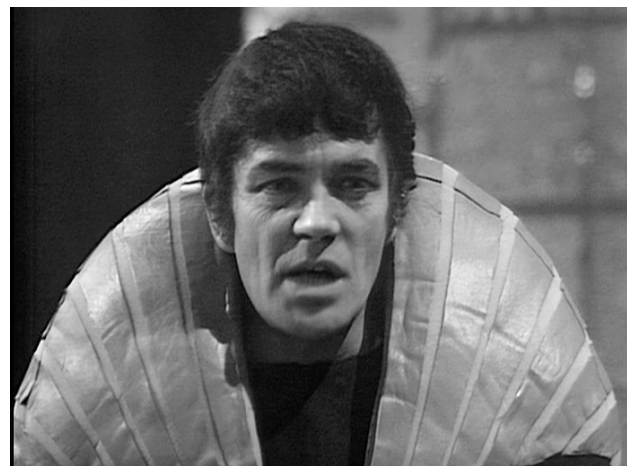
William Hartnell (until 1966)

Veteran British actor Hartnell was perhaps an unusual choice for a science fiction show aimed at a younger audience. His age, personality and schoolmaster's demeanor should have been enough to put kids off. Strangely it worked his elderly wizard like appearance added a sense of credibility to his role. He played the doctor until October 1966 when he retired due to ill-health.

He played a diminished role in the 1973 *Three Doctors* but he had passed away by the time the 1983 *Five Doctors* program was made and his role was played by a substitute actor.

As the show developed his clothing changed from standard dress (in the pilot) to an Edwardian custom with a cane. He was ever shown smoking a pipe. Something today which would never pass in a kids program !!

Second Doctor



Patrick Troughton 1966 – June 1969

Troughton played the part with a lighter touch. His character was carefully developed from Hartnell's – something of the same fussiness, the slightly old-fashioned look – but he was more "human" if that's the word to describe a Time Lord.



Third Doctor Jon Pertwee 1970 – 1974

Pertwee is fondly remembered by many fans. Calm, wise and approachable, he made the Doctor a little more humorous and warmer.



Fourth Doctor Tom Baker 1974 – 1981

Many believe Tom Baker to be the most popular doctor of all time. Warm, credible and almost universally popular, Baker helped transition the Doctor from a children's audience to more so-

phisticated science fiction. The Seventies marked a period of great change and Doctor Who had to keep us with the times to sustain its audience.

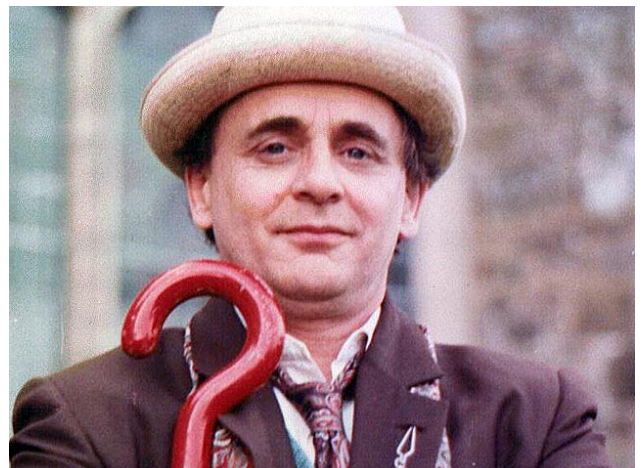


Fifth Doctor Peter Davison 1981 – 1984

The producers got it badly wrong here. Davison had just finished a series called All Creatures Great and Small where he played a young, irresponsible country vet. They tried to transplant his part into Doctor Who and it just didn't work. Davison gradually made the Doctor more serious but it was a battle. It wasn't helped by a silly piece of costuming that had him wearing shirts and braces with little question marks embroidered on them. Why? The Doctor never introduced himself as anything but "the Doctor" so such tinsel was completely unnecessary and quite silly.

Seventh Doctor Sylvester McCoy 1987-1989

Sylvester McCoy came with his offside Ace. In my humble opinion he was the worst Doctor of



all, he seemed like a bad copy of Mr. Bean. McCoy constantly rolled his R's and talked in a silly manner. His outfitting was woeful and The Doctor still has those damn question marks on his vest. An attempt was made to update the theme which failed miserably.



Eighth Doctor Paul McGann 1996

Paul McGann only played Doctor Who once and that was in the 1996 movie. It was hoped this film (coproduced with Universal) would kick start a new series made in the U.S, it didn't.

Ninth Doctor Christopher Eccleston 2005

Eccleston was an interesting choice of Doctor. Russell T. Davies was chosen to create a new series of Doctor Who updated for a very new audience. The scripts were sophisticated and hence the Doctor needed to reflect a different type of time lord. The Doctor as portrayed in the



first new series is a warrior. He is cold, battle weary and tough. While Rose helps soften his edges, he is a very different sort of Doctor.

Tenth Doctor David Tennant 2005–2010

David Tennant took over from Eccleston after only one season. Personally I think this is a shame as I feel that Eccleston's warrior persona brought something different to the role of the Doctor. As the last timelord having survived a terrible timewar he was clearly battle scarred and this added an edge to the role. Tennant was an interesting choice who took a lot of fans a little while to warm to.

The new Doctor is a sophisticate, a bit metrosexual and very educated. He brings a strong emotional presence to the Doctor as well as a sense of humour. Rather than a warrior the Doctor is more wounded and lonely, having suffered too much loss through his eight hundred plus years of life.



Eleventh Doctor Matt Smith 2010–

Matt Smith is the newest incarnation of the Doctor. He is the youngest choice so far at 27 years of age. While this has proved very popular with the teen market, I believe that his choice has moved the focus of the show to a much younger audience. The combination of this teen focus and the fact that the show is now directed by Steven Moffat has changed the feel of the series and the ramifications of this are yet to be seen. The first new series starring Smith also starred Amy Pond with the tale beginning with her as a child. While there were interesting episodes the teen emphasis of the series somewhat put me off. I will be intrigued to see where Smith and Moffat take the Doctor in the next series.

Other Doctors

There have been other actors who played the Doctor in a range of media.

Peter Cushing, *Dr. Who and the Daleks*. (1965)
Peter Cushing, *Daleks – Invasion Earth 2150 AD* (1966)



Trevor Martin, *Doctor Who and the Daleks in the Seven Keys to Doomsday* (2008)

(Stage play and audio, Martin is shown as the regenerated doctor)

Adrian Gibbs, *Logopolis (Castrovalva)* (1981)
The Watcher/The Doctor

Richard Hurndall, *The Five Doctors*, (1983) The First Doctor

Michael Jayston, *The Trial of a Time Lord* (1986) Evil Version of the Doctor

Michael Jayston, *He Jests at Scars*, Audio (2003) The Valeyard, alternate reality Doctor

Geoffrey Hughes, *The Trial of a Time Lord: The Ultimate Foe* (1986) Mr Popplewick (a disguise used by The Valeyard)

Sylvester McCoy, *Time and the Rani* (1987)
The Sixth Doctor (briefly, under a curly blonde wig before regenerating)

David Banks, *Doctor Who - The Ultimate Adventure*, Stage (1989) understudy for Jon Pertwee)

David Banks, *The Planet of Storms*, Stage (1996) The Doctor

David Banks, *The Web of Fear*, Stage (2000) The Doctor

Nick Scovell, *Fury From the Deep*, Stage (2002) The Second Doctor

Nick Scovell, *Evil of the Daleks*, Stage (2006)

Nick Scovell, *The Daleks Masterplan*, Stage (2007) The First Doctor

Lenny Henry, *The Lenny Henry Show* (1985) Spoof

Rowan Atkinson, *Doctor Who and the Curse of Fatal Death* (1999), Spoof, The Ninth Doctor

Richard E. Grant, *Doctor Who and the Curse of Fatal Death* (1999) Spoof, The Tenth Doctor

Richard E. Grant, *Scream of the Shalka*, Webcast (2003) The alternate Ninth Doctor

Jim Broadbent, *Doctor Who and the Curse of Fatal Death* (1998) Spoof, The Eleventh Doctor

Hugh Grant, *Doctor Who and the Curse of Fatal Death* (1999) Spoof, The Twelfth Doctor

Joanna Lumley, *Doctor Who and the Curse of Fatal Death* (1999) Spoof, The Thirteenth Doctor

Mark Gatiss, *The Web of Caves* (1999) Spoof, The Doctor

Nicholas Briggs, *Minuet in Hell* Audio (2001)

The eighth doctor is making a materialization in an alleyway in Malebolgia and something goes wrong. His mind is temporarily merged with Gideon Crane, a British journalist from the London Torch.

Nicholas Briggs, *Exile* Audio (2003), The previous incarnation of Arabella Weir's Doctor (likely the Second Doctor).

Nicholas Briggs, *Seven Keys to Doomsday*, Audio (2008) The Third Doctor

Geoffrey Bayldon, *Auld Mortality*, Audio (2003) Alternative First Doctor

Geoffrey Bayldon, *A Storm of Angels*, Audio (2005) Alternative First Doctor

David Warner, *Sympathy for the Devil*, Audio (2003) Alternative Doctor (possibly third)

David Warner, *Masters of War*, Audio (2008) Alternative Doctor (possibly third)

David Collings, *Full Fathom Five*, Audio (2003) Alternative Doctor

Ian Brooker, *Full Fathom Five*, Audio (2003) Alternative Doctor (uncredited)

Derek Jacobi, *Deadline*, Audio (2003) A delusional writer who believes he is the Doctor

Arabella Weir, *Exile*, Audio (2003) Alternative Doctor (possibly third)

Jon Culshaw, *The Kingmaker*, Audio (2006),



The Fourth Doctor

One of the stranger cases is where Jackson Lake (David Morrissey) believes he is the Doctor and even has created his own TARDIS. A memory device backfired and flashed the doctor's memories into his mind leading him to believe his is now the Doctor.

Regeneration

As William Hartnell became more and more ill a difficult decision had to be reached about how to bring in a new doctor. By the second story of Season four, *The Tenth Planet*, the decision had been made to replace Hartnell with a younger actor. Lots of ideas were discussed. According to recently released BBC internal memos the concept of renewal was finally decided on with the use of special effects a "bit like



a bad LSD trip". The concept was that at a given time the Doctor would die and through renewal appear in a new body. This would be achieved through the power of the TARDIS. This process is described in *The Power of the Daleks* episode as being akin to a caterpillar turning into a butterfly. It is first stated in *The Deadly Assassin* (1976) that a Time Lord can regenerate twelve times before dying. In later episodes it is stated the Doctor can regenerate forever. It was only at the end of the Third Doctor's era, in *Planet of the Spiders* (1974) that the Doctors renewal is finally called regeneration.

Many have conjectured that as time has gone regeneration has taken on characteristics of the concept of reincarnation. The Doctor experiencing death and then being reborn in a new body with memories which only slowly return has much in similarity with both Hindu and Buddhist ideas on the life-death process.

The Doctor's Regenerations are:

The First Doctor slowly grows older and then dies of exhaustion in *The Tenth Planet*.

The Second Doctor is exiled to Earth by the Time Lords and is forced to regenerate in *The War Games*.

The Third Doctor dies of radiation poisoning from the Great One's cave of crystals on Metabelis Three in *Planet of the Spiders*.

The Fourth Doctor falls from the Pharos Project radio telescope and merges with the Watcher in *Logopolis*.

The Fifth Doctor dies of Spectrox Toxemia exposure in *The Caves of Androzani*.

The Sixth Doctor regenerates when the Rani shoots down the TARDIS in *Time and the Rani*.



The Seventh Doctor dies in a San Francisco hospital during exploratory heart surgery by a doctor unfamiliar with Time Lord physiology. (1996 TV Movie)

The Eighth Doctor's reason for regenerating is unknown. This was due to the fact that there was a large gap between the TV movie and the series revival in 2005.

The Ninth Doctor dies of cellular degeneration, caused by absorbing the energies of the Time Vortex to save Rose Tyler's life, in *The Parting of the Ways*.

The Tenth Doctor dies of radiation poisoning, caused by the power supply of the Immortality Gate in *The End of Time* which had been left on by The Master.

The Companions

Doctor Who is accompanied by a range of assistants throughout the series. In the early series many of these are young, female assistants but an effort was made to avoid any suggestion of emotional entanglements. In the new generation series (post 2005) the Doctor is generally pictured with a primary female companion with some various degrees of emotional attachment, from strong and intense emotional closeness such as with Rose to a buddy role with Donna.

The First Doctor

In the first series the Doctor had a range of male and female companions, of varying significance. Susan Foreman was the first companion of the Doctor and she stayed on Earth after the Dalek Invasion in the 22nd century. It is suggested she is a Gallifreyan as well as the doctor's granddaughter. Other characters which play a supporting role include Ian Chesterton and Barbara Wright.

As the story develops and the doctor parts from Susan, he invites Vicki, who has survived a



Susan Foreman

spaceship crash on planet Dido to join Ian and Barbara on the TARDIS. In *The Chase* Steven appears when he is found on the planet Mechanus. He stays with the crew through *The Daleks' Master Plan* to Steven's journey eventually ends during *The Savages*, when he decides to lead the society of Savages and Elders that is attempting to create a lasting peace.

Katrina joins during *The Myth Makers* where she is a handmaiden of the prophetess Cassandra. She dies during *The Daleks' Master Plan*.

Sara Kingdom is a security officer for Mavic Chen from the 41st century, she joins the Doctor to work against Chen's interests. She appeared in parts four to twelve of the twelve-part 1965 serial, *The Daleks' Master Plan*.

Polly and Ben are both assistants to the doctor, Polly actually appears as an assistant to the First and Second Doctors as does Ben. In the end they decide to resume their lives as the Doctor continues his travels.





Jamie

Dodo enters at the end of *The Massacre of St Bartholomew's Eve*. Dodo somehow walks into the TARDIS thinking it was a real police box. She travels into the future with the doctor but in the end decides to remain in the 20th century.

The Second Doctor

Polly continues on with the second Doctor as does Ben. Jamie is described as a piper of the clan McLaren from the 18th Century and travelled with the second doctor appearing in episodes from 1966-1969. Victoria first appears in *The Evil of the Daleks*, however, in the end finds she is unsuited to the Doctors way of life. At the end of *Fury from the Deep* she settles with a family named Harris in the 20th century. Zoe is a young astrophysicist who originally lived on a space wheel in the 21st century, she appeared in episodes from 1968 to 1969. In the end of the series the Time Lords force regeneration on the doctor, wiping Jamie and Zoe's memories and returning them to their own time.

The Third Doctor

Liz Shaw was a member of United Nations Intelligence Taskforce, an international organisation that defends the Earth from alien threats. She first appears in *Spearhead from Space* and was the companion of the Doctor for the 1970 season. In *The Sarah Jane Adventures* story, *Death of the Doctor* we are told that Liz Shaw is now working on a base on the moon.

Jo Grant appears in *Terror of the Autons* (1971), having been assigned to the Doctor as a replacement for Liz Shaw by U.N.I.T. While origi-



A young Sarah Jane Smith with K-9

nally young and inexperienced so goes on many adventures with the doctor and develops her own unique role in the series. In *The Green Death* she falls in love with Professor Clifford Jones a young greenie. She ends up marrying him and going off to study vegetation in the Amazon.

Sarah Jane Smith is one of the more significant companions of the Doctor. She also appeared in Doctor Who spin off series *K-9* and *The Sarah Jane Adventures*.

She was originally a journalist and was a companion to the Third and Fourth Doctors from 1973-1976. She returned in the Fifth Doctor story *The Five Doctors* (1983), the 30th-anniversary story *Dimensions In Time* (1993). A rather nice touch is that she also returned in the new series of Doctor Who, playing a role in such episodes as *School Reunion* (2006), *The Stolen Earth, Journey's End* (2008) and *The End of Time* (2010).





Leela

Fourth Doctor

Sarah Jane continues with the Fourth Doctor and one of his most unusual companions becomes a major figure, K-9 a small robotic dog. Other companions include Harry Sullivan, a rather staid English character who plays a medical officer and Leela, who was a violent if unrestrained character who learns from the Doctor how to train her emotions and feelings. Leela was originally a warrior of the savage Sevateem tribe, who were the descendants of the crew of The Mordee Expedition that crash-landed on an unnamed planet in the far future.

Romana is a female timelord, otherwise known as a timelady. She is able to regenerate and hence appeared in two rather different roles. Romana I was played by Mary Tamm from 1978 to 1979. Romana II was played by Lalla Ward from 1979 to 1981.

Adric is from the planet Alzarius, which exists in the parallel universe of E-Space. He was the companion of the Fourth and Fifth Doctors and appeared in episodes from 1980 to 1982. Adric dies in *Earthshock* when he tries to stop a su-



Tegan, Doctor and Nyssa

perfreighter controlled by the Cybermen crashing into the Earth. Nyssa first appeared in *The Keeper of Traken* and joins the Doctor on his travels. She appeared in episodes throughout 1981 to 1983. She also continued as a companion to the fifth Doctor.

Tegan was a companion to the Fourth and Fifth Doctors and appeared in episodes from 1981 to 1984. Surprisingly while not as well remembered as Sarah Jane, she was actually the longest companion in terms of continuous years on the series (3 years and 1 month). Tegan is an interesting companion as while she enjoys her adventures with the Doctor they clearly take a terrible emotional toll on her. In the end she after being possessed by an ancient intelligence and facing off against the Daleks she decides this is not the life for her.

The Fifth Doctor

Adric, Nyssa and Tegan continue as companions to the fifth Doctor. Vislor Turlough is an unusual companion in that he has been charged with assassinating the Doctor by The Black Guardian. He continues to vacillate as to whether undertake this duty and the ambiguity of his role made him a very interesting companion. Kamelion is a shape-changing android and appears in episodes between 1983 and 1984. Peri is a companion of the Fifth and Sixth Doctors and appears in episodes from 1984 to 1986.

During the time of the Fifth Doctor much controversy developed over both Vislor as the would-



be assassin companion and Peri who seemed to spend most of her time in skimpy outfits.

The Sixth Doctor

Peri continued with the Sixth Doctor with Mel, who is the Companion to the Sixth and Seventh Doctor. Mel is a computer programmer from 20th century earth, she first appears in *Terror of the Vervoids*, part of the 14-part story *The Trial of a Time Lord*. In *Dragonfire*, she decides to travel on the *Nosferatu II* leaving the Seventh Doctor to travel on with his new companion, Ace.

The Seventh Doctor

Mel continues with the Seventh Doctor and when she leaves, the Doctor continues on with Ace. Ace comes from 20th-century Earth and appears in episodes from 1987 to 1989. She is a troubled teen who has a difficult life. Since the



series essentially ended in 1989 until its revival we do not know how or why she left the Doctor.

The Eighth Doctor

The companion to the Eighth doctor was a cardiologist from San Francisco. She assisted the Doctor against The Master. Since this was for the television movie she doesn't appear again the series. There was also controversy about her role in the film since the doctor actually kisses her breaking the long taboo against the Doctor having emotional entanglements.

The Ninth Doctor

The Ninth Doctor played by Christopher Eccleston marks the beginning of a very new take on Doctor Who. His primary companion is Rose Tyler and she continues through further series. She is down-to-earth, funny and enthusiastic. Support roles are played by her mother, Micky her boyfriend and Captain Jack Harnass. Captain Jack is a radical departure from what has gone before. He is a trickster, openly bi-sexual and flirts with everyone including the Doctor. He



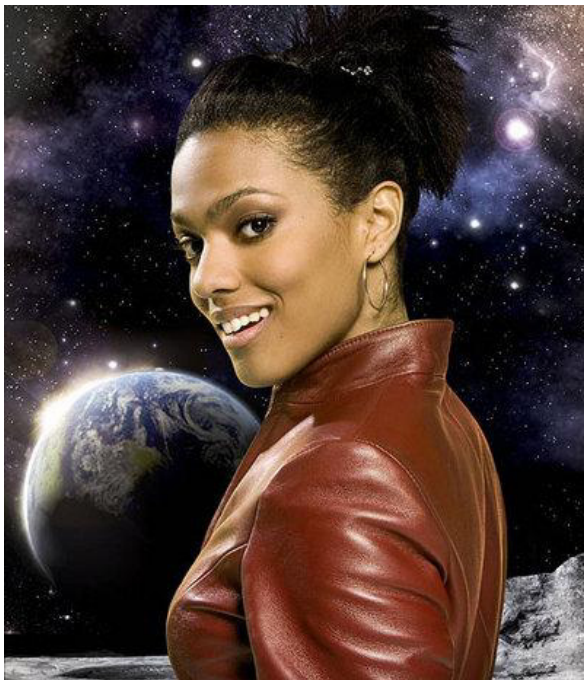


Donna Noble

plays a significant role throughout the new series and is central to the Torchwood spin-off series.

The Tenth Doctor

Since the Tenth Doctor went over various series we have a transition from Rose to a new companion. There was Donna Noble, one of the



Martha Jones



Amy Pond and Rory

stranger choices for a companion. She was played by Catherine Tate, an English comedian with a dry sense of humour. With Donna there was no love interest more of a buddy companion role. Martha Jones was a significant companion to the Doctor. She was a medical student on earth and becomes a strong willed and intelligent companion. Later she plays a role in Torchwood. Astrid Peth appears in one episode played by Kylie Minogue, it really was nothing more than a celebrity cameo and fans were pleased when she died at the end of the episode. Captain Jack continues to appear throughout the series and there is even a re-appearance of old companion Sarah Jane Smith. Various other supporting characters appear as minor companions in the various specials.

The Eleventh Doctor

The Eleventh Doctor is accompanied by Amy Pond and her boyfriend Rory.

Captain Jack Harkness

Captain Jack is one of the more unusual characters in Doctor Who. While the Doctor is immortal since he is a Timelord, Captain Jack is reluctantly immortal. He slowly ages but cannot be killed. Indeed it is revealed later in the series that over millions of years he aged slowly to become The Face of Boe.

The Doctor is portrayed in various ways in the new series, from a warrior (Christopher Eccleston) to a wounded humanitarian (David



Tennant). He always resists violence and refuses to use a weapon. In juxtaposition Captain Jack has a questionable past as a con man and is willing to use whatever means to get the job done. At the end of *Children of the Earth* (a *Torchwood* series) Jack faces the loss of the man he loves and realizes that in the war he has fought he has lost his humanity. A unique aspect of Captain Jack's personality is that he is openly bi-sexual. While the Doctor loves his companions he holds back as he has lived to see too many of his companions get old and die as he stays young. While Captain Jack simply enjoys the opportunities that sexual flexibility offers.

Sexuality and Doctor Who

The new series of *Doctor Who* has a very different approach to sexuality and relationships than the earlier series. The Doctor is seen as emotionally vulnerable and clearly attached to his companions. He is especially hurt by having to leave Rose and works to keep a controlled distance from other companions. In comparison Captain Jack is not just bi-sexual but pansexual, he has relationships with all sorts of other



species. In Season 1, Episode 9/10 *The Empty Child* and *The Doctor Dances* Captain Jack makes his first appearance and his sexuality becomes immediately obvious. The Doctor explains this by saying that in the future mankind has moved into space and learned to dance with many species. ("dance" being an in-joke between the Doctor and Jack meaning Love), he ends his discussion by saying "*there are so many species and so little time*".

This approach to sexuality is continued throughout the series, while the Doctor's sexuality is not directly discussed when Captain Jack kisses him on the lips he shows no sign of rejection. In *Torchwood* the sexual ambiguity continues with Jack having relationships with both Gwen and Ianto.

Adversaries of the Doctor

Doctor Who has had many enemies throughout its long history, just some include the Autons, the Sontarans, the Cybermen, the Silurians, Sea Devils, the Ice Warriors, the Yeti, the Rani, the Daleks, the Slitheen, Ood, Judoon, the Master, the Time Lords and Weeping Angels.

The Autons first appeared in *Spearhead from Space* (1970). They were life-sized plastic dummies, animated by the Nestene Consciousness.





The Nestene was an extraterrestrial intelligence which first arrived on Earth in hollow plastic meteorites.

The Sontarans are a race of humanoids with a stocky build, greenish brown skin, and a distinctive dome-shaped head. They reproduce by cloning. They first appeared in *The Time Warrior* (1973).



The Silurians first appear in *The Sea Devils* (1972). They are a different evolutionary stream which evolved on planet earth. They are reptilian and decided to go into hibernation in a large underground complex to survive the upheaval which would be caused when the earth captured the moon. They were brought back quite successfully in the new series in episodes *The Hungry Earth* and *Cold Blood*.

The Sea Devils were cousins of the Silurians introduced in *The Sea Devils* (1972).

The Ice Warriors were introduced in *The Ice Warriors* (1967) and were a race of reptilian-like humanoids who originated on Mars.



The Yeti first appeared in episodes *The Abominable Snowmen* (1967) and *The Web of Fear* (1968). While it looks like a big hairy creature, it is actually a robot controlled by an intelligence from another dimension.



The Rani appeared in *The Mark of the Rani* and *Time and the Rani* (1989). She was essentially the female equivalent of The Master, an evil timelord. It is rumored that River Song in the new series may be her new incarnation. Her





history is that she was banished from Gallifrey as she liked to manipulate the biochemistry of other species and when this got out of control her lab mouse grew to a huge size and ate the presidents cat !

The Slitheen appeared in the new series episodes *Aliens of London* and *World War Three* (2005). Of the new series creatures, they were not the best in presentation. They are creatures of living calcium, hatched from eggs and native to the planet Raxacoricofallapatorius. They use a special device to fit into human skin but it has the awful side effect of making them fart all the time.

The Ood appear in *The Impossible Planet* (2006) episode and various times after. They are actually a peaceful species who live to serve. They are humanoid in appearance with coleoid tentacles on the lower portions of their faces. They require a translator device, a small



sphere connected to their "mouths" by a tube, to facilitate speech between them and humans. They only became enemies of the Doctor when they were used by The Beast.

Judoon first appear in the episode *Smith and Jones* (2007). They are essentially grunts, fairly unintelligent space police. They are humanoid, with rhinoceros-like heads and only four digits on each hand: they wear black, bulky armor.

The Weeping Angels appear in the Tenth Doctor episode, *Blink* (2007) and the Eleventh Doctor episodes, *The Time of Angels* and *Flesh and Stone* (2010). They are space hunters, they seem to be made of stone but slowly they creep up on you. If you look directly at them you are turned to stone. According to the Doc-





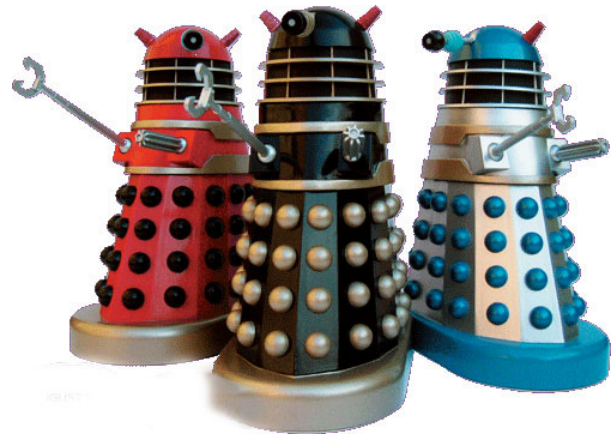
tor, the Weeping Angels "*are as old as the universe (or very nearly), but no one really knows where they come from*".

There are many minor adversaries of the doctor but they are a good selection. The most famous figures are The Cybermen, The Daleks and The Master.

Cybermen

The Cybermen are a race of cyborgs who return to fight the doctor again and again. Their origins began as a species on Earth's twin planet Mondas. To live longer and achieve greater strength they began to supplement their bodies with artificial parts and then replace organs with superior metallic structures.

Soon they became a master race convinced that only by removing all humanity and becoming metal men could the universe be conquered. They purge their minds of all emotion and become living machines.



Daleks

The Daleks are the best known of Doctor Who's adversaries. They first appeared in 1963 and have proved immensely popular in every episode in which they feature. They are small alien mutants who live inside mechanical armour shells, they originate on the planet Skaro. They work as a collective and want to exterminate all beings inferior to themselves. They are marked by a loud metallic rasping voice which cries "exterminate".

Originally designed to be an allegory for the Nazis they were updated in the new series and make various appearances. Related to the Daleks is Davros.

He originally created the Daleks and regularly returns as the ultimate villain behind the Dalek onslaught.





The Master

The Master is an intriguing character who is both the Doctor's enemy yet also a link to his childhood on Gallifrey. The first actor to play The Master was Roger Delgado, who continued in the role until 1973. The Master was then played by Peter Pratt and Geoffrey Beevers until Anthony Ainley took over and continued to play the character until Doctor Who's hiatus in 1989.

In the new series of Doctor Who The Master has taken on a different focus. In the new series there are no other timelords or timeladys (though River Song may change this in later series), so The Master is the Doctor's only remaining link to his old life. In many ways he is like the Doctor's brother yet one who is dangerous and out of control.

The Doctor sees, however, that the Time Lords have actually driven The Master mad by implanting a sound in his mind through which they could reach into the future and escape their death in the timewar. Accordingly the Doctor shows compassion to The Master and tries to save him over and over again. This new ap-



proach to The Master adds a great depth to his character and John Simm does a great job creating a complex figure which is both tragic and dangerous.

The Time Lords

The Time Lords are depicted as the Doctor's enemies due to the genocide they caused in the Timewar. When they use The Master to return he must work out a way to defeat them since they aim to destroy all time and ascend to a state where they can exist as mind beings alone.

Reflections on the Revival of Doctor Who (2005 Onwards)

Series 1 (2005)

The new series of Doctor Who was an immense gamble, while science fiction is always popular trying to revamp a series after a 16 year hiatus is quite a task. Russell T Davis, while a great director, was known for his controversial programs (such as *Queer as Folk*) and how his perspective would work on a much loved science fiction series was hotly debated. However it worked. Christopher Eccleston was an excellent Doctor, somewhat of a warrior, aggressive and dominant. He regularly called humans stupid and apes and this certainly endeared him to me !!

The first episodes were somewhat uneven as the series tried to find its feet. Episodes such as *Aliens of London* and *World War Three* were marked with pretty B grade special effects. The farting Slitheen were not especially memorable. By the time we reached episode 1.6 there was a noticeable improvement in both plot and spe-



cial effects and the return of The Daleks couldn't have happened at a better time.

Starting with Father's Day a far better character developed begins to occur and this really drives the plot. There is also the exploration of darker themes and something unusual for science fiction intelligent emotional content. In Father's Day there is a good exploration of the pain of loss when you lose someone you love and our desire to change the past. *The Empty child* and the *Doctor Dances* brings the series into far darker territory and introduces the enigmatic character of Captain Jack.



The conclusion of this series is intriguing. The doctor seems to be willing to become as vicious as the enemy to save the universe but does a doubletake when the enormity of the genocide he must commit is brought home to him. Rose becomes a temporary time lord and saves the day but since the doctor must absorb the energy of the Tardis to save her it triggers his regeneration. It would have been interesting to see Eccleston develop more as the doctor as he had a much sharper edge and was more "warrior like" that later doctors in the new series.

Series 2 (2006)

David Tennant is now the doctor and matches a suave presentation with a much more wounded soul. He is not as much as a warrior as Eccleston but still fulfils his task well. He comes across as a metrosexual sophisticate and this has its benefits and drawbacks.

My major gripe about Tennant is that the series presents him as some sort of "superman". He can solve every problem. In the first series Eccleston seemed able to fail, while Tennant is some sort of superhero figure and this, at times, takes away from the credibility of the series.

Series 2 includes some excellent episodes including an unusual time travel episode focused on Madame de Pompadour (the mistress of King Louis XV) in the 1700s. The return of the Cyberman is a marvelous sight, while the strangeness of "*Satan in space*" in episode 2.9 is also memorable, if not for the quirky plot.

At the same time some of the stories in this series such as Love and Monsters and Fear Her were pretty dismal. However. the way in which



the Cybermen are again resurrected with Army of Ghosts and Doomsday to create a global war between Cyberman, Daleks and man makes an excellent conclusion to the series which includes an emotional farewell to Rose.

Series 3 (2007)

Martha Jones becomes the Doctor's new companion but he is still dealing with the loss of Rose. The wounded lonely doctor, at times even bitter and angry, is an important motif throughout this series.



Episodes 3.4 and 3.5 proved very popular with a new Dalek theme. This time the Cult of Skaro are working on experiments to merge the Dalek and Human races so that the Dalek race can once again rise.

Episodes 3.8 and 3.9 *Human Nature* and *The Family of Blood* are one of the stranger double episodes. To escape the Family of Blood the Doctor imprisons himself on earth wiping his memory. He lives a human life haunted by strange dreams and visions until he awakens and works out who he really is. A fascinating tale which looks at the doctor's desire to be "normal" and yet understanding he cannot. It is a great depiction of the Doctor as the immortal outsider, always helping others yet always alone.

The final three episodes are considered the best of all the series. They focus on the battle between the Master and the Doctor. The plot is complex for the doctor, on some level, understands the genesis of the Master having grown up with him on Galefrey. In many ways he loves the Master as a brother yet knows The Master is



dangerous and disturbed. These three episodes offer many revelations including the fact that Jack is the Face of Boe. Martha also takes her leave of the Doctor, opting for family and a medical degree. The Tardis flies away but the Titanic smashes into its control room !

This led into the Christmas episode *Voyage of the Damned* that featured as a one off Aussie pop singer Kylie Minogue. The episode was interesting but the celebrity nature of Minogue took away from the plot and many viewers applauded when she plummeted to her death !



Series 4 (2008)

Series 4 features Donna Noble, played by Catherine Tate, an English comedian as the Doctor's companion. Her role in Doctor Who is debated among fans. While she has a devoted fan base for her comedy, her cynical tone and constant attempts at humour grated many and more than any other companion she seemed to wear out her role before the series ended.

A number of the episodes in series 4 have historical themes including *The Unicorn* and the



Wasp which has an Agatha Christie plot and The Fires of Pompeii which is set in Pompeii.

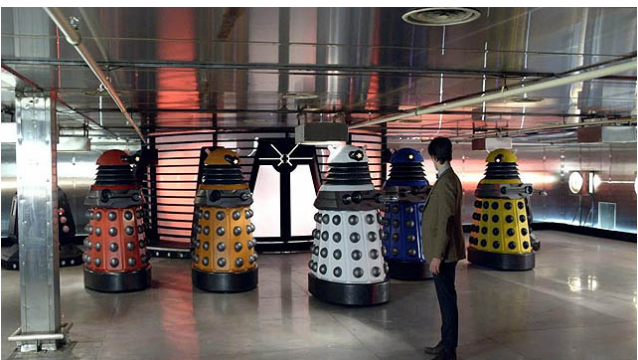
One of the stranger episodes is Partners in Crime which feature the rather loveable fat babies, the Adipose, small white alien babies made from human fat !

There are lots of good themes in these episodes including an exploration of cloning in The Doctor's Daughter and the Cyberman and Daleks return at the conclusion of the series in Journeys End.



Season 5 (2010)

Season 5 stars Matt Smith is now the new doctor. He is a lot younger than any of the doctors and the focus of the show does seem to be on a younger, if not teen, audience. It is hard to eval-



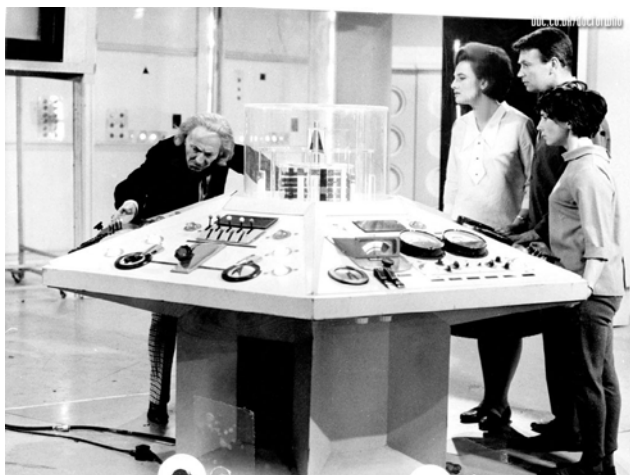
uate Matt Smith as the series is still young. In this first season many of the episodes are excellent but they do seem to lack some of the bite of earlier series. However it may be that he simply has to grow into the role.

Season 5, Episode 3: *Victory of the Daleks* is an impressive new take on the Daleks placing them in World War II and given them a multi colour makeover. There is a re-occurring theme about a crack in time which gives the season an overarching plot not found in the other series. This is a new development and does give it a bit more depth. Series 1 did include an overarching motif about Bad Wolf but the crack in time was the most evolved overarching plot to date.

Episode 12 and 13 *The Pandorica Opens* and *The Big Bang* is impressive with all the doctors' enemies ganging up to lock him in the Pandorica. Now it is up to Amy and Rory to save the doctor and the world.



We are now up to Season 6 and it will be interesting to see what develops next.



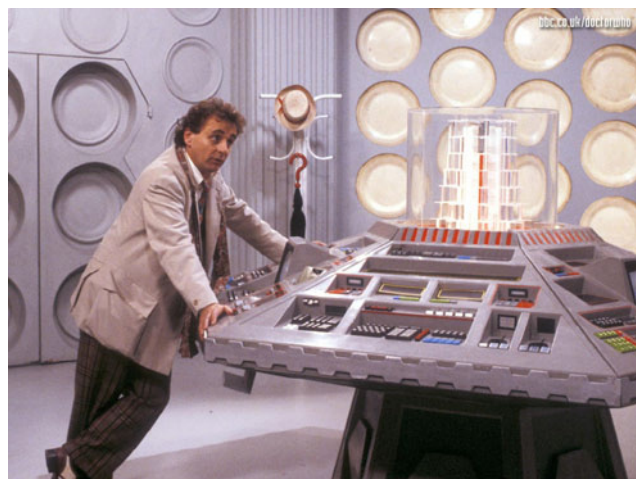
The very first console used by the Doctor.



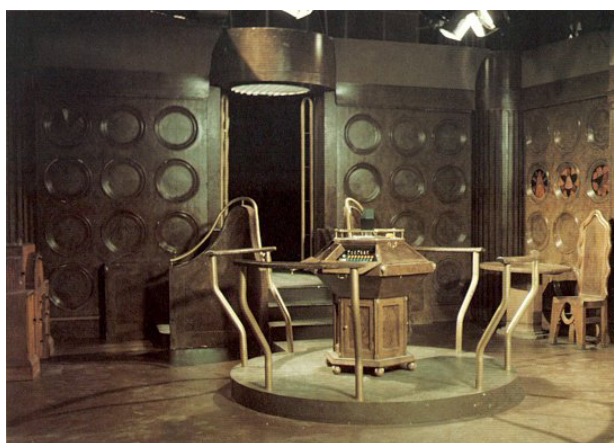
Davidson's console



The Pertwee Console



Sylvester McCoy's Console



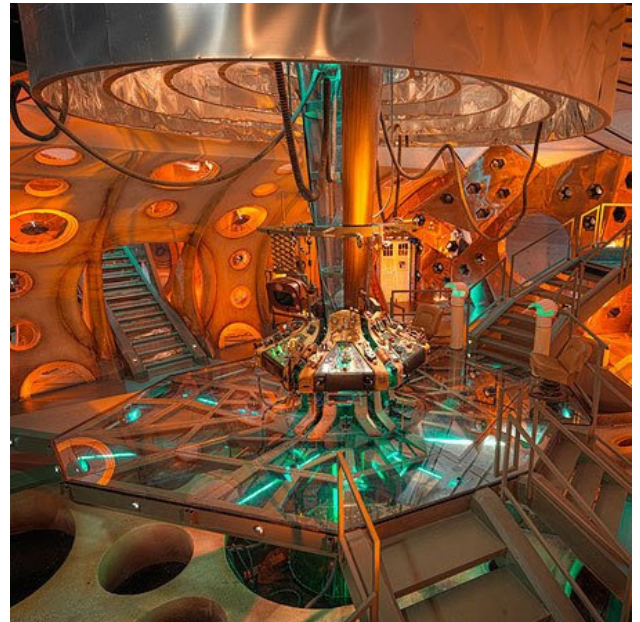
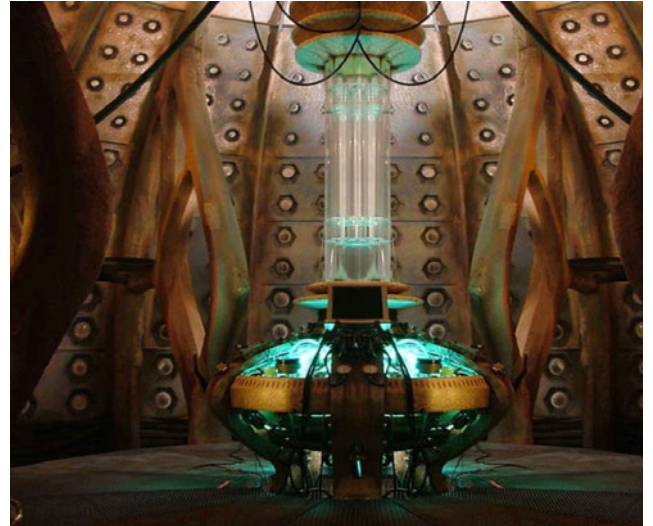
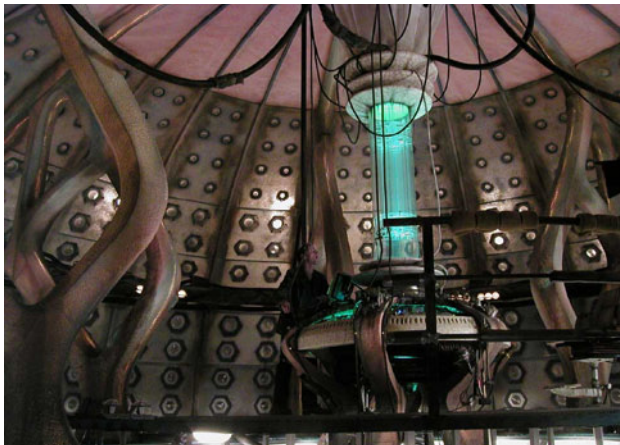
Tom Baker's rather steampunk Tardis control room. It didn't last long as it was made of wood and hence went mouldy in storage ! It has controls hidden behind panels and was a very cool looking console !



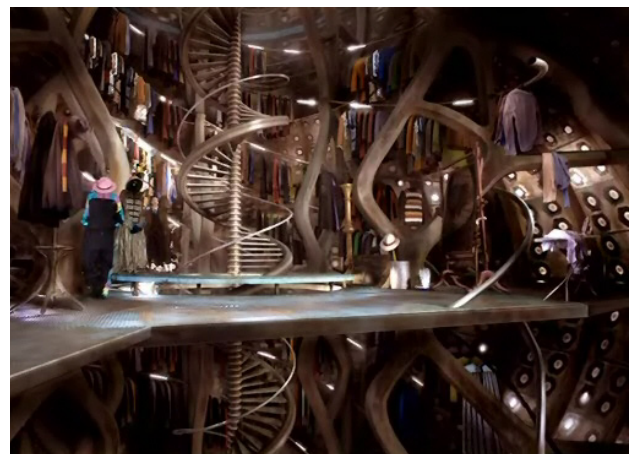
McGann Television Movie Console, part steampunk part H.G. Wells Time Machine



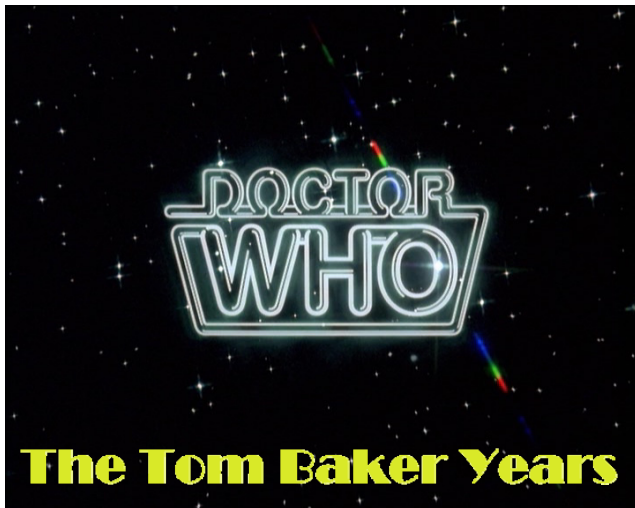
Better view of the McGann Console



The Modern Tardis Console Different Views



Tardis Close/Wardrobe



Thomas Baker was born in January 1934 in Liverpool, England. He was the fourth actor to play the Doctor in the BBC Sci-Fi series Doctor Who. Baker left school at the age of 15 to study to become a Roman Catholic monk but fortunately for us he then lost his faith (more commonly known today as "he woke up to himself"). He then joined the Royal Army Medical Corps and served for a period of two years. Prior to Tom taking the reins of the T.A.R.D.I.S he had worked in many roles with a local theatre company.



Early in 1974 Jon Pertwee's Doctor fell at the hands of some psychically evil spiders in Episode 74 – *Planet of the Spiders*. As a Time Lord the Doctor has the uncanny ability to rise from the dead that is meant to be that he is able to regenerate his body into a new shell. In doing so the Doctor's personality is also changed, and as such the more flamboyant Tom Baker makes his debut as the 4th Doctor

Tom's role as the 4th Doctor marks a major turning point in the overall history of Doctor Who series to that date. The BBC moved away from the authoritarian schoolmaster stereotype to a character that now portrayed a dashing adventurous personality. Tom Baker's Doctor was fun, eccentric and yet just as technically competent and certainly more socially competent. The BBC realised that Doctor Who was no longer the educational show with a science fiction background that they had envisioned, but had developed a cult following with the British and Australian populace who demanded that BBC now promote the series as credible science fiction in its own right.

Previous Doctors had a rather boring image while the BBC still regarded Doctor Who as a kids' show. John Pertwee was introduced to soften the character a little and they made him human by adding a little drama rather than slapstick. Pertwee played the part in a lighter vein but still had an air of seriousness and authority when needed. It was a good mix of drama and light-hearted scifi but still his Doctor was a little aristocratic.

With Tom Baker the seriousness was played down even more.

This made Baker one of the most popular Doctors in the early history of the show. He played the part from 1974 to 1981 (Season 18). He had originally received his training in the Laurence Olivier National Theatre Company. While this gave him great acting skills it hardly seems to be preparation for the role of the Doctor.

He played the Doctor as slightly eccentric, with an ever-ready bag of Jelly Babies. His Doctor was charismatic, tall and flippant, traits that Baker himself developed in the Doctor as he settled in to the part. That character didn't change much during Baker's seven years so he must have had a clear vision of what the Doctor should be. The audiences liked the character too. Baker became one of the most popular Doctors and the show occasionally drew audiences of 12 million viewers. From 1978 Douglas Adams, well known comedy SF writer, became the Script Editor. His skills undoubtedly helped Baker continue to improve the character.

The long scarf wasn't planned as part of the Doctor's look – it was loaned to Baker by a stage hand on a cold day. Everyone liked it - it only made him look a little more eccentric - so the scarf stayed. That's one story. The other has the costume designer's wife being supplied with too much wool. She just kept on knitting until she ran out.

The BBC also took the opportunity to revamp the Tardis as well. Baker's Tardis was quite good, with its simplistic mechanical key to open the door.

In the time he was in the series Baker had a lot of companions. The popular and competent Sarah Jane Smith from Season 11 was one of the best. The robot dog K9 Mk1 and Mk2 (built by Professor Marius) also appeared but wasn't as popular as hoped. Romana came before that, and Tegan. Many of the episodes became classics and are among my favourites, especially Key to Time, Seeds of Time, and Genesis of the Daleks.

The role of UNIT and its commanding officer Brigadier Gordon Lethbridge-Stewart was continued and strengthened during Baker's period. UNIT, originally the United Nations Intelligence Taskforce, was designed to combat extraterrestrial and paranormal threats to earth. It first appeared in the second Doctor episode The Web



of Fear. Various Doctors worked with UNIT over the years before it dropped into obscurity. It was last seen in the 1976 Tom Baker episode *The Seeds of Doom*, but has been revived again in the new series. In 2005, quoting UN dissatisfaction with the use of their initials, Russell T, Davies arranged to change the name. In 2008 in the episode *The Sontaran Stratagem* UNIT reappeared as the Unified Intelligence Taskforce, a neat compromise.

Tom Baker was replaced for Series 19 in 1982 by Peter Davison. It was a bad choice as Davison took the lightheartedness to an extreme and trivialised the Doctor's role. He just wasn't up to the same standard as the Doctor that Tom Baker had portrayed.

If you think you have heard Baker's voice on the TV recently, you are probably right. He did the narrator's voiceover for the British comedy *Little Britain*. Following his Doctor Who appearances his voiceover work has flourished. He is regarded as the fourth most recognisable voice in Britain after the Queen, Tony Blair and Margaret Thatcher.



How Europe Does Babes, Bombs and Guns
Dorado Films Inc
R1 DVD

Eurospy films were the budget answer to Britain's successful James Bond films of the sixties and seventies. They were made in many countries, especially Italy, and were of varying quality. The British rarely took part as they were working their way into comedy like the Carry On films, although Modesty Blaise is an exception to this. Synergy has already looked at some of the European films. Perhaps the best were the French OSS117 films that were hilarious parodies rather than serious spy films. This set from Dorado looks at some of the Italian and coproduced Eurospy offerings.

Although Italy had a big film industry producing many films for local consumption they found it difficult to export, as their writers did not seem to have the ability to create new genres. They were forced to copy other successful overseas styles. Sometimes they got it right, as in the "spaghetti westerns", but with other genres their films were very ordinary.



The Eurospy films lacked the enthusiasm and humour of the Bond films. The limited budgets meant that the feature gadgets that made Bond films so much fun were missing.

The theme music was almost universally awful and the action was mostly fistfights. Outside shots of the cities were rare, generic and had that library footage look to them. After a few years the industry was offered tax benefits by some countries to make part of each film in a recognisable part of their country. This eased the budgets and allowed more outside shots and the films improved steadily.

This doesn't mean that they were bad films. They were what they were intended to be – budget films "in the style of....." for mass consumption. Let's have a quick look at the films in this set to see how they stack up.

From The Orient With Fury (1965)

Agent Malloy (Ken Clark, real name Kenneth Donovan) must track down a stolen ray gun while fighting off women and baddies. He is handicapped by his uncanny ability to walk into a room and find it full of bad men, who will then either hold him at gunpoint or beat him up. This is an unashamedly Italian film even though it is supposedly set in Paris with a showdown in Istanbul. The scenery is mostly anonymous long shots but we see a lot of beautiful interiors of



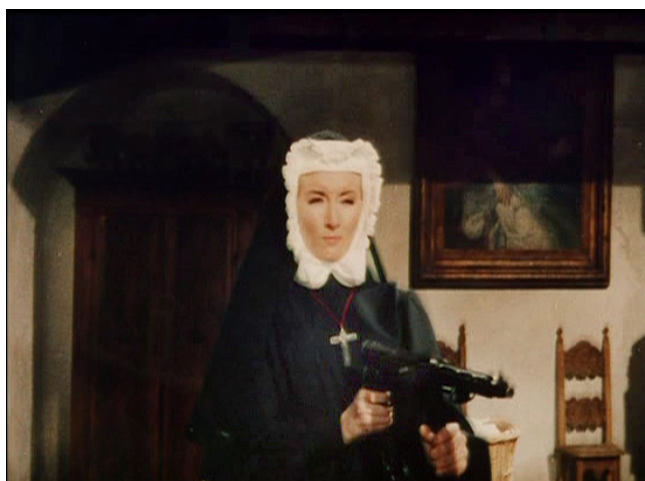
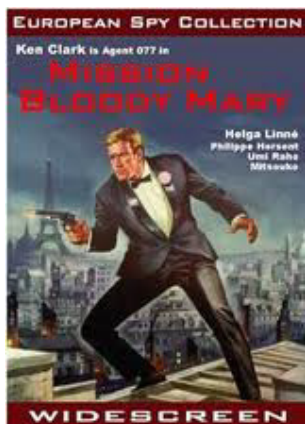


splendid buildings. Orientals? I didn't see any. Perhaps the title is a take off of another film – like *From Russia With Love*? Clark does the suave Bond thing quite well, but compared with a Bond film the women are seriously overdressed. So as not to offend the strongly Catholic audiences, perhaps?

It undoubtedly has the worst theme tune and music of the films in the set and the voice over-dubbing often seems to belong to another film.

Mission Bloody Mary (1965)

International criminal mastermind The Black Lily has stolen a new type of atomic warhead and is offering it to the highest bidder. Agent 077, Ken Clark again, follows the warhead and The Black Lily around Europe trying to recover it for the U.S. With some help from a double-crossing taxi driver he tracks it down to Istanbul.



Once again there are lots of fistfights, an occasional gunfight and a tour of a marble quarry. Once again there are many women, some making laughable attempts at bellydancing. This film is an improvement on *From The Orient With Fury* and even the theme music is better.

Special Mission Lady Chaplin (1967)

Agent 077 is given the job of recovering sixteen Polaris nuclear missiles stolen from a sunken U.S. Navy submarine. Along the way he must fight a lethal female assassin and the compulsory diabolical criminal mastermind. His first job is to recover the dog tags of a lone seaman who seems to have survived the sinking. If the tags are genuine this will lend credence to the missiles that have been offered for sale. This, of course, requires him to go to Europe.





From here the usual string of beatings and shootings follows.

The assassin is Lady Chaplin, who runs fashion shows with her troupe of models. This gives an excuse for some gratuitous lingerie shots. Although the fashions look a bit dated now, they were probably very trendy in the sixties.

This film was a considerable improvement on the earlier ones. The film was better-financed and there were more outside shots, the sets were more elaborate and well detailed, the fights were more convincing and the plot was better. Even the villain had little Bond-like touches such as his pet fighting scorpion. The standard of the film is more like the earlier Bond films rather than a cheap copy. It's obvious that more money was being spent on each film and the writers and directors now had a good idea of the style of film they wanted.

Electra One (1967)

Another of the Spanish-French- Italian coproductions. This one is unusual in that it doesn't star Ken Clark. He only made the three films shown above.



The Professor has developed a new drug that can cause hysteria.

Released into the military it could lead to the end of the world by allowing the officers to start a nuclear war. The U.S. wants it and so do the Russians who have invented an antidote.

A criminal organization called Electra 1 has stolen the drug and kidnapped the Professor and is threatening the world with destruction. The antidote is also stolen by a freelance thief, Gary. Cue car chase at this point, which seems a little unimpressive after the gimmicks in Bond's Aston Martin. There are the usual fights and gunplay. Gary gets involved in as much trouble as Ken Clark. He must choose sides to get the help he needs against Electra and rescue the Professor's assistant. Since none of them trust the others the rescue will be interesting.

The DVD transfer is let down by the poor quality of the original film. It is dark, out of focus, and the sound fades in and out. Otherwise it looks like it would have been a good film. This is not due to Dorado – it is simply a result of these films having been disregarded for so long that few prints survive and those that have are well-used. Dorado makes the most of what they can get.

The Eurospy films faded out with the growth of the spaghetti westerns. This DVD set is a good representation of the genre and its evolution.

Web: <http://www.doradofilms.com/>

**Queen Victoria :
Demon Hunter
A E Moorat
Hodder and Stoughton
Hachette 2010**

She loved her country. She hated zombies.

When Seth Grahame-Smith wrote *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* in 2009, followed by *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*, he started a whole new genre of literature.

By taking an old and dreadfully boring “classic” novel and inserting more interesting themes like zombies he created a different comic style. With the success of his books it was only a matter of time before other authors produced their own spin on history.

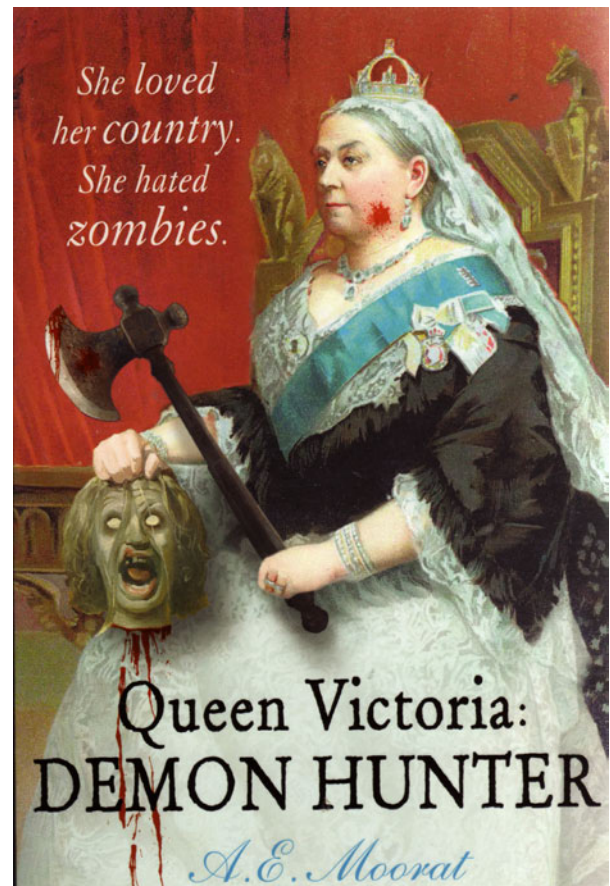
British author Andrew Holmes, writing under the pseudonym A E Moorat, has chosen not to abuse the classics but to produce a novel based on historical figures. He is a horror fan so what could be more natural than to expose Queen Victoria to the depredations of demons?

The demons of Baal have been intent on their long-range plan to have one of their own control the most powerful country in the world. They have carefully bred themselves into many of the great European royal families, including that of Prince Albert. He is half demon, as is (unknown to herself) Victoria. The offspring of their marriage will culminate the demons’ world domination plans.

The British monarch has always had a small group of Protektors, able fighters who are aware of their demon opponents and have fought them for centuries. The current Protektor is a girl named Maggie Brown. She must train Victoria to defend herself and make her aware of the nature of her enemy. This is hard because Victoria is deeply in love with half-demon Albert but is unaware of the demon blood she also carries.

Moorat has written a good horror novel although I would like to have seen a little less modern slang – it spoils the atmosphere of the book a little.

There are some wonderful characters. The lascivious Lord Quimby has his own plans for domi-



nation, aided by his zombie butler Perkins. Perkins remains loyal to Quimby as long as he can get his regular feed of fresh entrails.

A source of power for Quimby is the members of the British Parliament, so he invites them to his home where Perkins converts them to zombies. Feeding them and Perkins is becoming more difficult and one day a feeding frenzy breaks out in Parliament.

Meanwhile Prince Albert has been kidnapped by Sir John Conroy, the demon who controls Quimby and Victoria’s mother. Victoria and the surviving Protektors must defeat his evil plans and rescue Albert, but will Victoria’s love for Albert survive in the face of his demon ancestry?

It is a good demon story and its historical background sets it apart from the usual schlock. A little more attention to the period style of writing would have improved it, but even as it is it’s a good, often funny story. I eagerly await his next novel, *Henry VIII: Wolfman*.

Counter Attack
Mark Abernethy
Arena
Allen & Unwin (2010)

Adventure stories with an Australian touch are uncommon. Perhaps it is the familiarity of the readers with the places being described that takes some of the edge off what would normally be a good story.

Mark Abernethy has overcome this by using Australian characters in more exotic south east Asian cities and settings. The resulting book demands to be made into a full-length feature film.

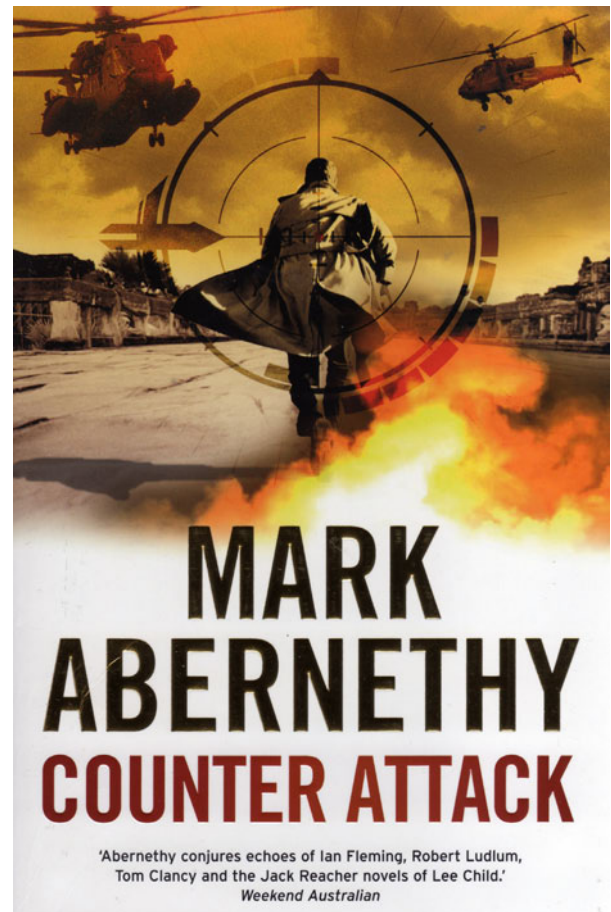
Australian agent Alan McQueen has come back to the intelligence service from retirement. Instead of the desk job his wife would have preferred he is put on active field service. When a job goes badly wrong in Singapore and two Australians are executed it looks like retirement is again an option. Instead he is given a surveillance job in Saigon.

He is to check out an Australian diplomat who seems to be spending a lot of time outside the office on unaccounted-for missions. It may be a simple case of domestic strife or it may be something more sinister. McQueen finds him in the seedy part of downtown Saigon and watches him meet some unidentified men. They swap a computer memory card then the Australian is executed. McQueen is into something deeper than a routine reconnaissance job.

As the story unfolds the magnitude of McQueen's task almost overwhelms him. There is far more opposition than he anticipated and some of it is coming from his own country's interdepartmental rivalries. It is hard to tell whose side the Americans are on since their allegiances change whenever somebody can be of use to them.

The Israeli hit team has a mission too, but nobody knows what it is – just that a lot of people die around them. The Communist Chinese seem to be involved as well, but their involvement is not clear until later in the book.

McQueen also finds himself up against the Chinese Tongs, criminal gangs who control most of the major crime in south east Asia.



The story is fast-moving and wide ranging, from the rich financiers homes of Singapore to a child slave camp in the jungle of Cambodia. We are spared nothing of the seedy side of Asia where life is so cheap.

The characterisation is less important than the action, but in McQueen we see a man loyal to his country but operating pretty much on his own because he doesn't know which of his countrymen he can trust.

His contacts from the past help a lot. He is pushed to his limits and looks like being another victim until he starts playing the game by the opposition's rules – dirty and violent. There is so much wheeling and dealing and double crossing that it's a wonder the book isn't longer.

I don't get to read much fiction, but this was a book I read in two very long sessions of "just another couple of pages". I wasn't disappointed.

**Dark Stars Rising
Conversations
from the Outer
Realms
Shade Rupe
Headpress (2010)**

Dark Stars Rising is a smorgasbord; no an orgy, of images, photos, posters and amazing tales. It is as though some of the very favourite weirdos from the readers of Synergy have all agreed to get together and get interviewed for a book ! It is an amazing collection offering interviews with a motley crew of individuals who define what being an outsider is all about; challenging, transgressive and taboo breaking, *Dark Stars* makes you think as well as entertains, Rupe is an excellent interviewer and obviously comes to his interviews with his groundwork done, he is always prepared. Indeed it would be fair to say these are some of the best interviews I have seen in quite a while. He elicits lots of interesting responses and directs the interviews into unusual directions. There is not a boring interview in *Dark Stars*, each one is sharp, witty and insightful. The visual quality of this book is breathtaking; it is filled with photos, paraphernalia, posters, movie shorts and lots more. It is creatively



presented and superbly edited.

It would be impossible to review all of the contents of this book, it is large, filled to the brim with creativity, madness, perversity, horror and joy. The first section is an excellent selection of interviews followed by a series of book and movie reviews.

To give you a taste I will give you my own personal guide through just some of the interviews.

Divine, what can be said about Divine. When I was young she was my inspiration, a transvestite terrorist perhaps even the patron saint of Drag. When quiet little Glen Milne became divine he could voice the unmentionable and say the unthinkable. From the filthiest people alive to crime making your beautiful John Waters and Divine changed the world as we know it forever.

Richard Kern is the man who feminists hate. He has a no bullshit approach to film, photography and sex and explores the dynamics of eroticism in a compelling manner. His sex is dirty, honest and highly charged. His interview is fascinating and intriguing.

One of the best films on the Manson family was *The Manson Family* by Jim Vanbebber he pushed the limits in really showing what they were like rather than the sensationalist and salacious view of the media. He gives us the ins

and outs of his filmmaking including insights on Deadbeat at Dawn.

Zamora is the torture king and explores all manner of body modification. From early days exploring pain and pushing his body to the limits he came to swallow swords, stand on eggs without breaking them, use needs, piercings, eat fire and utilize electricity in a very creative manner. This is amazing tale !



Dennis Paolo is not a name to conjure with, yet if we mentioned Stuart Gordon you would start to move in the right direction. Paolo wrote *Reanimator* and *From Beyond* two of the coolest genre tales ever made it to film. Gordon worked with Paolo and created some amazing films, *From Beyond* is still one of my favourite Lovecraft inspired tales. This is a great interview with lots of discussions about scriptwriting, horror, Hollywood, censorship and more.

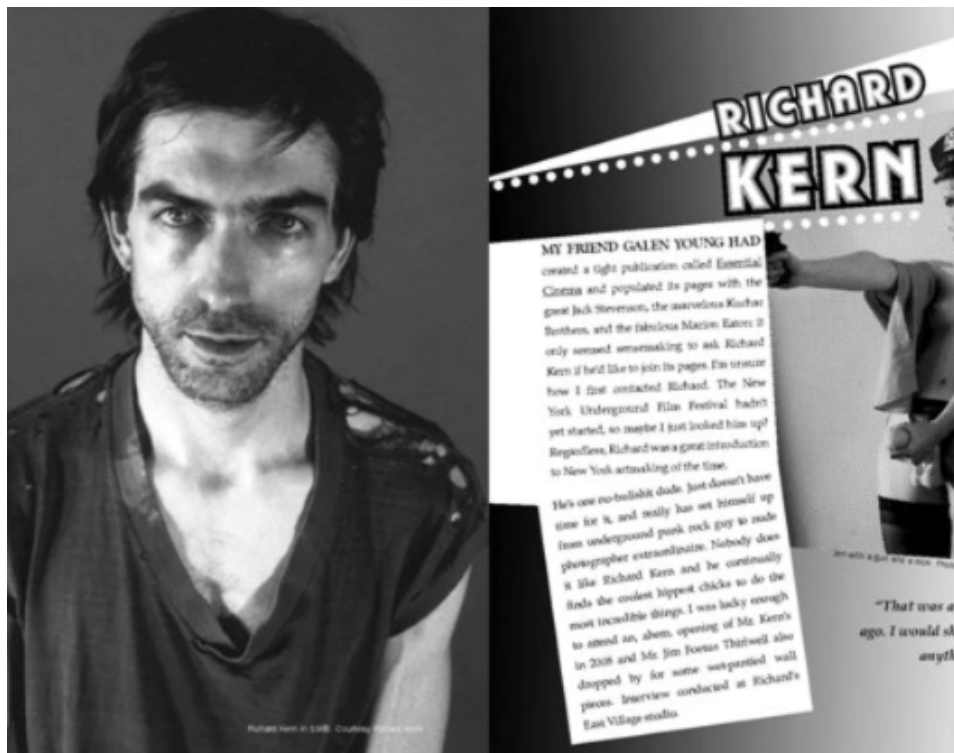
I first saw a segment with Brother Theodore on a Disinformation series DVD. He was a true old world eccentric, strange, confronting, intense yet bewildering intelligent. He continued to perform shows until well into his nineties when he fell, developed pneumonia and died. This is his story.

Teller of Penn and Teller offers a meandering journey through his career, reflecting on acting, comedy, scepticism and his many failures and successes.

Herman Nitsch is a hard man to describe. His art explores blood, suffering, sex and death and has a visceral impact many cannot bear. He began using animal blood, then moved to animal carcasses and later even to slaughter animals which were scheduled for killing. His performances are true primal experiences and this interview by Rupe gets behind the art and explores the man and his vision.

Another unusual artist is Genesis P'Orridge, a musician of some fame, a gender explorer, a sorcerer and a creator of worlds. He is well known for his many musical incarnations from Throbbing Gristle to TOPY and his work combining magick and music. He is a true iconoclast who breaks every mould and is always exploring something new.

There is a very cool interview with that enigmatic



actor Udo Kier, European, sophisticated, dark and brooding. From an actor in Andy Warhol films to Madonna's sex video and book. I still remember with glee his perverse presence in *Flesh for Frankenstein* when he stated '...to know life you must fuck death in the gall bladder!' This article is accompanied by some awesome movie posters and stills

Alejandro Jodorowsky is a magician and filmmaker; I am not sure which comes first. His classic films *El Topo* and *Holy Mountain* are still considered the best esoteric surrealist films ever made. This interview discusses his early influences such as working with Arrabal and the Panic movement. He also discusses the making of *Santa Sangre* and *Tusk*. He has a unique and surreal approach to spirituality which is reflected throughout the interview.

Tura Satana has been the inspiration of many young women and the lust object of many a man. When she appeared in *Faster, Pussycat Kill Kill*, she epitomized the strong independent woman. This interview gives her life story which was both tough and ultimately inspiring. Leading from a brutal rape and a loveless marriage she slowly took control of her life and became the Tura Satana.

Richard Stanley is always an enigma. Hardcore is still one of the strangest and most sur-

real independent sci fi films ever made and *Dust Devil* is a perfect evocation of mood and dark brooding spirituality. This is a fascinating interview on his life and work.

Being a Misanthrope I have always liked *Willard* and Crispin Glover brought him alive to a new generation. This is a marvellous interview which shows he is far more interesting than the average actor!

Dark Stars Rising should be welcomed with glee; it celebrates the different, the strange and the downright perverse. It opens up a window to the personal world of so many individuals that we have read about but would like to meet. Now thanks to Rupe we can, his interviews bring us right into their presence as they open up and tell us all about themselves. There is not a dull moment in this stunning volume and I most highly recommend it.

**Hispanic Batman
The Collected Archives
Vol 1**

**By Rodriguez, Bernstein and Bradstreet
Royal Flush Magazine**

Although this is nominally a comic book it has nothing in common with the Superhero comics I

remember. It is written in the current dark, socially aware style and the plots, such as they are, deal with lampooning the white American attitudes to Mexicans. It also manages at the same time to lampoon Mexican attitudes to themselves. This is presented in a mass of politically incorrect jokes, homosexual jokes, bodily function jokes, even cannibal jokes. It is a hard mix to understand and won't be fully appreciated by everyone as it seems designed to be deliberately offensive. It's rude, crude and very funny.

The artwork is mainly by Rodriguez and Bernstein and I love their badly shaven, overweight superhero in his saggy costume, and his sidekick with the massive overbite. Even their sound effects are parodies of the real Batman – "Fwbap", "Kablooey" and "Shhklunkt" are meaningless out of context but just seem so right in a cartoon of this style.

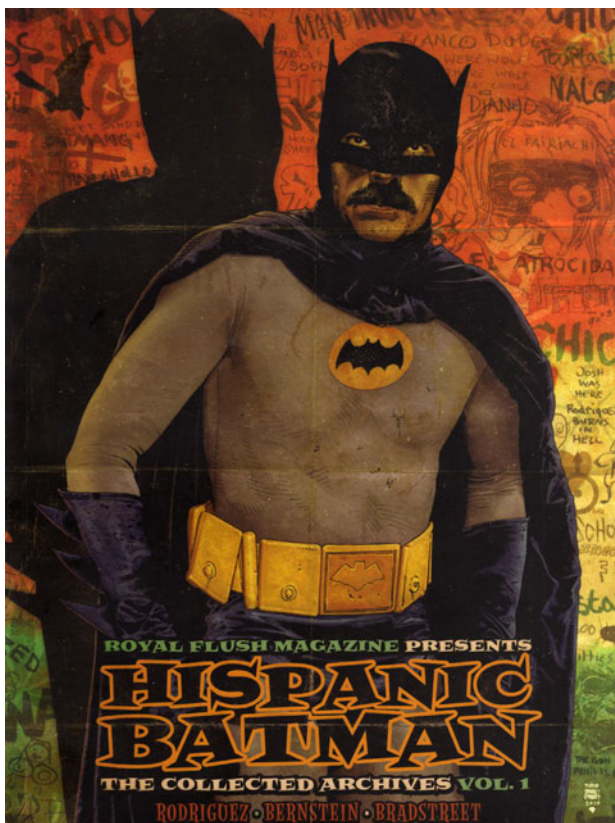
I can't see Hispanic Batman becoming the superhero that the guy in *Gotham City* is, but Hispanic Batman is more irreverent and much funnier.

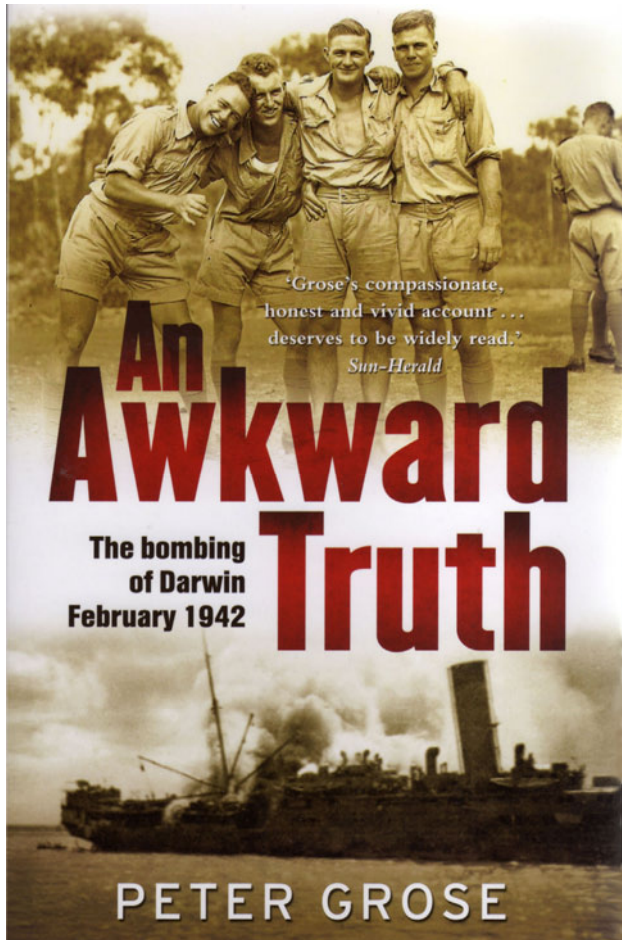
Web: <http://royalflushmagazine.com>

**An Awkward Truth
The Bombing of Darwin February 1942
Peter Grose
Allen & Unwin 2010**

The bombing of Darwin during World War II is an area of Australian history that has largely been ignored or treated with an embarrassed silence. It is true that it was a tragedy full of errors, poor leadership and low morale. It is also true that there were heroes during the raids, many of whom received no recognition at all. Part of the reason the true situation is largely unknown is due to the Government's playing down of the raids on the basis of "National Security" on the advice of its military advisers. Peter Grose sets out to correct the misconceptions and provide as much factual information as possible. At this distance from the event it is possible to view it more dispassionately than it was at the time, so the book is timely.

Grose has drawn on the records of Douglas Lockwood, a journalist stationed in what was then a news backwater. Lockwood was there during the bombing and provided his own





firsthand experience. As a trained journalist he was also able to get information from many of the major participants – in a small town like Darwin Lockwood knew everyone. Grose has not stopped there, however. He also obtained information from diverse sources such as Mitsuo Fuchida, the leader of the bombing raids.

From these people he has managed to obtain a reasonably accurate outline of the raids – numbers of aircraft and so on. Some of his figures are vague, such as casualty numbers, but he explains the basis for his final figures and they appear convincing.

I was surprised to learn that the carrier task force that bombed Darwin was the same one that hit Pearl Harbour about eight weeks earlier and had just taken Rabaul. They used the same tactics as before and obtained the same surprise. Their enemy, the Australians and U.S., made the same mistakes and were just as unprepared for the attack. Once again there was sufficient warning of the incoming aircraft but the sighting was misinterpreted and no action was taken. Once again the first indication

of battle was when the bombs started falling. Unlike Pearl Harbour the town's critical infrastructure like the Post Office was hit directly and civilian casualties were high.

Grose pulls no punches in his book. It falls into roughly four sections. In the first he discusses the people and what preparations they had made. The Northern Territory Administrator does not come off well in his evaluation, but Grose tries to treat him fairly. Areas of the Administrator's responsibility like Air Raid warning and emergency planning was inadequate or non-existent. Thanks to administrative bungling over authority and pay, Darwin had no official Civil Defence organisation, only a loose (and secret) agreement between the military and the ex-Civil Defence wardens.

In the second section Grose gives a compelling account of the raid itself. Rather than Lockwood's single impression he is able to discuss the raid from many perspectives including that of the Japanese fliers.

Such defences as there were fought back valiantly but they were too few and poorly equipped. This is where the heroism came through from some people – the pilot of the only surviving Kittyhawk fighter aircraft is one.

The third section deals with the aftermath. This is probably the most shameful period that Australia has endured during any war. There was little leadership and that was incompetent. The Administrator, who should have been organising medical relief and basic civil defence measures, was more concerned with getting the official silverware and cutlery and his collection of wines to safety. To do this he demanded the services of up to four badly-needed civil policemen to pack and guard his belongings. He paid much less attention to the disintegration of his town. In the information vacuum left by his complete abdication of responsibility rumours abounded. The critical one was that orders had been given for all civilians to evacuate Darwin. Thus began the shameful race south on the limited road and train lines available. People who were critical to the continued operation of the town were heading south as fast as they could go.

The military fared no better. The RAAF commanding officer decided that instead of preparing for further raids and preparing what defenc-



es he could salvage from his battered airfield he should arrange for all personnel to leave the base and camp in the bush until the base water supply could be restored. The orders were misunderstood and the base staff also headed south. The Military Police who should have been helping the town police to keep order and control the looting were led by a man who was chronically drunk. The Provos therefore indulged in an orgy of looting on their own behalf.

The civil police, believing a rumour that the town was now under military control, felt powerless to stop it. The strongly unionised wharfies and sailors from the sunken ships were either heading south or living on the beach from supplies that floated ashore. They were no help at all in the rescue efforts since there was no leadership from their unions. Grose spares nobody – if criticism is due he highlights it and backs it up with evidence.

Finally, as is usually the case, some minor officers in critical areas came to the forefront and got things organised or back in order. Suitable refugees were ordered back to Darwin to handle the clearing of streets. Communications were put back in order, the dead were collected and buried (often in mass graves) and Darwin was at least a little better prepared for the many raids that followed.

The fourth section covers the politics. The Government had only been in power for a short time and was currently fighting a diplomatic battle with Churchill for the return of two Australian divisions from Africa and the Middle East to de-

fend Australia and New Guinea. The attacks on Darwin were an unwelcome diversion and they had little information on what had happened anyway. They released what they knew to the newspapers but as the casualties and damage estimates rose “National Security” came into play and the true results were played down. They did, however, establish an Enquiry which detailed as much evidence as possible from eyewitnesses. This report is the basis of many of Grose’s figures. Its testimony shows how many people played down or played up their role to reduce the blame falling on them. Perhaps the best example of covering your back-

side came from the Administrator’s testimony. Quite simply, the man appears to have lied under oath and Grose is able to refute some of his testimony with more reliable evidence. He has included relevant sections from the Enquiry’s report in the book.

Grose interweaves all these threads to give a fascinating and detailed account of the raids. It is not just a dry history and he even manages to inject a little sarcastic humour at times:

“The banks had gone. Shops were shut and deserted. So were hotels. Looting was rife. The civil police felt sidelined. The military police were out of control. The Administrator’s port, sherry and other fine wines were in safe hands. Otherwise, Darwin was a mess”.

An Awkward Truth is a fine and detailed book about an event we should by now be able to look back on as a part of our history. It IS an important part of our history and should no longer be regarded as awkward. There are lessons to be learned from it, particularly from Grose’s examples of what happened when organization and authority broke down. He also makes one important observation about releasing information to the public:

“The Australian Government railed endlessly about public indifference to the war effort. The full horror of the attack on Darwin was its best chance to jolt Australians out of their apathy. Unwisely, it chose not to take it”.

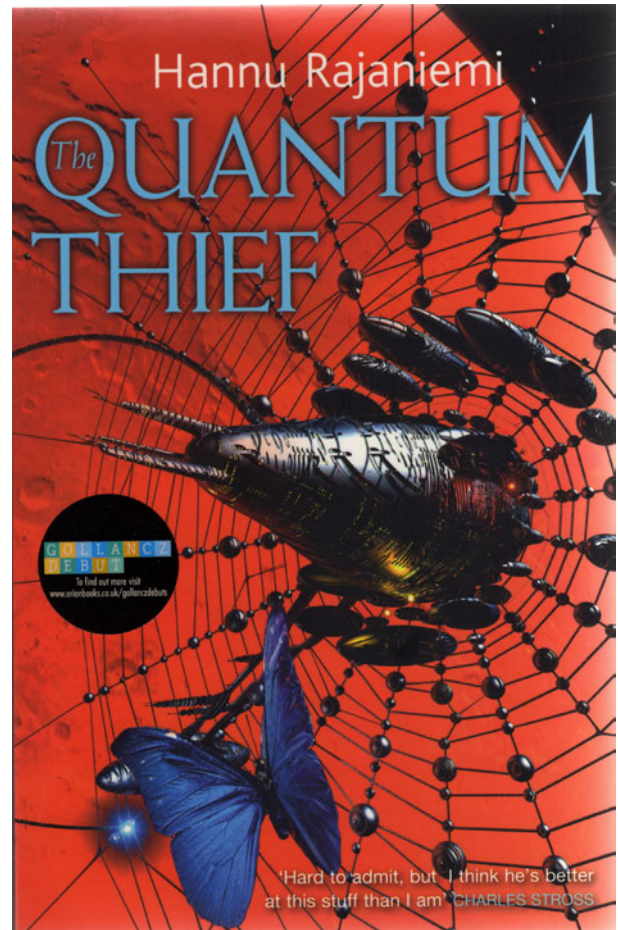
The Quantum Thief
Hannu Rajaniemi
Orion Books 2010

My first reaction to this book was confusion. It is full of words and concepts that are poorly explained, if at all. This makes it very hard to get started but gradually the story starts to take shape and settle into a more conventional narrative. Part of the confusion is caused by the regular flashbacks but these are critical to the story, so it's worth persevering. What emerges is a tight, fast-moving story of planetary rulership and subversion.

Jean le Flambeur is a criminal, the Galaxy's greatest and best-known thief. His disembodied mind is currently in prison playing endless strategy games against himself, games in which he usually gets killed in painful ways. His memories of his past have largely been wiped. He is sprung from prison by Mieli and her sentient spaceship. He is given a new body and instructions. She has a theft job for him on Mars in the Moving City. This appeals to Jean as the City has a huge memory bank, the Exomemory, that stores every memory of every person. When they reach the end of their allotted Time and die (become "Quiet") their minds are used to control insectoid creatures that perform public services. After a suitable period they can be "reborn" and all their previous memories uploaded into their new body.

The memories are protected by a security system called "gevulot" that allows the memory owner to trade the memories under their control. It can even be used to make them virtually invisible to others. Life can be extended (or shortened) by buying or selling Time. Since Jean came from the City he should be able to restore the memories of his past life, the memories that were erased when he was captured. There is, however, a problem with the Exomemory.

Someone is hacking into the memory banks, getting past the gevulot blocks and editing the memories of the entire population. It is unlikely to be the original Martian settlers, but it could be the refugee Zoku, a secretive clan that uses the Tzaddikim, another group of Quiets, to do their dirty work for them. The Zoku fled from a war with the Sobornost, who also have agents on Mars.



What is it that Jean must steal?
 Who is he really working for?
 How much of the City's history is true?

The idea of Time as a currency is interesting. So is the idea of half-physical, half-memory constructs and a City that relies on both to operate.

With the City possibly on the verge of destruction or revolution Jean's task becomes more urgent but he still finds time to recover some of his old memories, lascivious or otherwise. What he finds is not always flattering.

He is also being hunted by a Detective, Isidore Beautrelet. It becomes more obvious that the two men are working on the same problem from different angles.

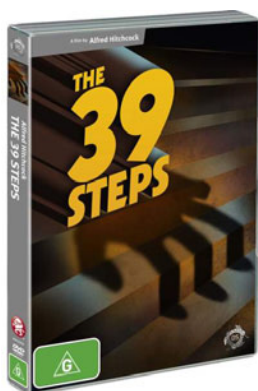
Quantum Thief is an interesting and inventive story. A Glossary would certainly have helped initially but it worked out well in the end. If Rajaniemi continues this way he could become an exceptional SF writer.

Alfred Hitchcock – Two Early Films Madman R4

We often forget that even the biggest name producers and directors had to start their careers somewhere and it interesting to see what their early work was like. These two films show us some of Hitchcock's early work in the period he worked in Britain and before he honed his experience in the suspense films that became his forte. His British output was prolific.

The 39 Steps 1935

This cleaned up reissue of Hitchcock's 1935 film is based on John Buchan's classic suspense novel. Based very loosely unfortunately. At this time in his career Hitchcock felt the need to have the book rewritten to make it more of an action film than suspense. Whole slabs of the plot were changed and if you have read Buchan's novel, itself a brilliant suspense work, you will probably be disappointed. Buchan could have taught Hitchcock a thing or two about suspense. Nevertheless it is still regarded as one of Hitchcock's better pre-Hollywood films and helped him to establish his reputation in the U.S.



The menacing man with the hooded eyes is gone, as are most of Hannay's survival skills learnt in South Africa. Instead of the plans being smuggled to Germany on paper we get a music hall turn, Mr Memory, who has the details embedded in his mind. The tragic agent Scudder is replaced with a Mysterious Woman.

Most importantly, instead of a competent self-reliant Hannay we get Robert Donat as some sort of lounge lizard with a surprising sense of humour for a man on the run. The effect is less convincing than the novel.

On the positive side it is fairly good as an action film anyway. There is some first class acting, including some great moments from a very young Peter Lorre. For its time the cinematography is remarkably good as is its transfer to DVD.

The Man Who Knew Too Much 1935

This is Hitchcock's early version starring Leslie Banks and Edna Best, not the later 1956 remake with Doris Day and James Stewart. Although the latter was regarded by Hitchcock as the better film, its use as a vehicle for Doris Day's singing rather confused the issue of whether it was a suspense thriller or just another silly semi-musical. The early version had no such problems. It was pure action and suspense, showing what Hitchcock would become as he gained experience. It had a good plot and Banks and Best made the best of it. Once again Peter Lorre turned in a great performance as leader of the bad guys.



Bob and Jill Lawrence and their daughter Betty are holidaying in Switzerland with their French friend Louis. Louis is shot and dies but only after telling Bob of a plot to kill a leading French politician. The evidence is hidden in the handle of his shaving brush. Before Bob can pass this information on to the authorities they are warned that if they tell anyone their daughter will die.

A desperate search for Betty's captors follows, with a final showdown in the street outside the Albert Hall.

The film is great suspense / drama, mercifully free of singing and just concentrating on good acting and a good plot. Of Hitchcock's early films, this could be one of the best.

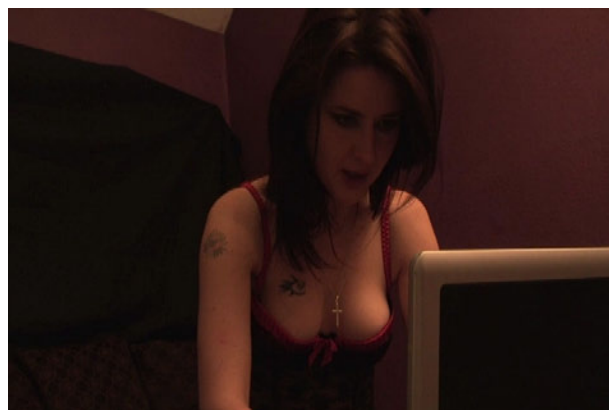
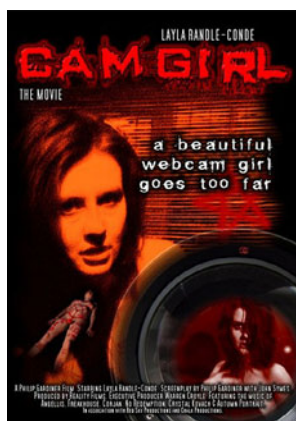


Cam Girl
Suspense
Chemical Burn
Entertainment
R4 DVD

First, I must caution that this film will not be to everybody's taste. Apart from the "budget cheapie sleaze" look it has a number of annoying bits of camera work that may turn you off it. The constant point-of-view shots, the intermittent and apparently purposeless changes from black and white to colour and back again and the jumpy picture can be useful techniques but this film uses them, I think, to excess. Initially it comes across as just another semi-tasteful skin-flick. If you feel adventurous, however, there is a very tense, suspenseful film buried in there.

The film starts by setting the atmosphere in black and white. A cam girl is one who performs sexually titillating acts on a paid internet site. Mary, screen name "Rose", is a cam girl. She has her followers and regulars but her work is still not profitable enough to pay the rent. She is in debt quite heavily and it is weighing on her mind. She can make more money as a prostitute but doesn't want to go there. As the pressure mounts, though, she is finding she may have no alternative.

One of her "Johns" whose screen name is Honourous seems a little nicer and less lascivious than most of her customers and is sympathetic to her problems. He urges her not to go down the prostitution path. Mary gets an offer to pose for a photographer and it will at least give her some badly-needed extra money. She has



no particular qualms about being photographed in the nude – after all, it's the same sort of work that she is doing on the webcam site. Her troubles turn serious when the photographer is found murdered shortly after the shoot. Mary may have been the last person to see him alive. It gets worse when she realises she is being spied on in her own apartment. Although she thinks it is her landlord, who is hounding her for the rent and has suggested she can pay it "in other ways", the pressure is building.

In desperation she turns to a priest who has been urging her to keep in touch with her church. He absolves her from what she has done and she feels a little better, but her problems are still there. Honourous is becoming more involved in her life and seems to be becoming obsessive about her. How can Mary get out of the problems that are dragging her closer to a breakdown? Can she even do it? Her only friends in the world are another cam girl and the mysterious Honourous.

The entire film is carried by the attractive Layla Randle-Conde. There are no other actors. It is a big load to put on a relatively inexperienced actress but she does a very credible job with only a few very minor glitches. We see a lot of her scantily-clad body but this is accepted as part of the plot, not just as sleazy voyeurism. The film taken by the spy camera in her apartment somehow looks more sleazy than her work. Once you have watched the film right through you see that the odd camera work becomes more logical. It is partly to overcome the lack of other actors and is partly to show that her life, such as it is, is so dependent on cameras. Her only contact with the real world is via her phone and webcam. I leave you to decide whether the technique works or not.



Centurion
Thriller
Hopscotch
Entertainment
R4 DVD

It is AD 117 and the Romans control much of the known world. In northern Britain they have been stopped by the brutal local tribes called the Picts, who have just attacked and destroyed one of the Roman outpost forts. The only survivor is Quintus Dias who is ordered back to the main Roman camp at York to tell them what happened. The Ninth Legion marches north under General Virilus. Quintus goes with them with a Pict defector girl warrior, Etain, as scout.

The story here closely parallels the events in the Germania forest when an inept Roman leader, Varus, led two legions into an ambush. Varus also was led by a German he regarded as Romanised and therefore trustworthy. He was wrong.

The Ninth Legion is led by Etain straight into a Pict ambush. Few soldiers escape. General Virilus is captured. When Quintus leads an abortive rescue attempt the Chief's son is killed and the Picts chase the survivors intent on revenge. Etain is among them.

Quintus' little group is picked off one by one, and the survivors will face treachery from their own people if they can make it back to their lines.

Centurion is a great story, well presented and

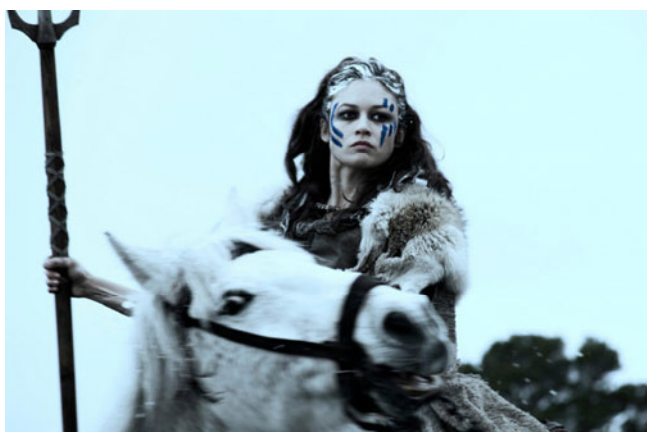


well acted. It is one of the new crop of Euro-films that uses the skills, scenery and production crews of a number of countries to achieve a great result. There are good actors and crew behind this film.

It was directed by Neil Marshall, whose *Dog Soldiers* is, I think, the best werewolf film ever made. Relative newcomer actor Michael Fassbender (impressive in *Inglourious Basterds*) is a very promising actor and we will see a lot more of him. Perhaps the star billing should go to Olga Kurylenko as Etain. Kurylenko is a Ukrainian model-turned-actress now working from France, so hopefully we will much more of her too.

Her wild and surly good looks added more to the picture than the compulsory female interest usually does, and she makes the most of her major part of a strong warrior woman.

All in all *Centurion* is a very satisfying film with good action and good acting, set in beautiful scenery. What more could you want?



Down Terrace Madman R4 DVD

This low budget crime film is a good example of what the British film industry can do with limited resources. It was written and produced by father and son team Robert and Robin Hill and Ben Wheatley.



The Hills also play the lead actors Bill and his mentally unstable son Karl. Bill is the head of a local drug distribution organisation and has just been released from prison after the police case against them fails. They now have a major job ahead of them – to find out who in their group has informed to the Police. The heads of the organization in London are not pleased with the drop in sales and expect the matter to be sorted out promptly and very quietly.

Back in their home with Bill's long-suffering wife Maggie, Bill talks to his friends to see what they have found out about the informer. Each of them seems straightforward but many have other events occupying their time now and they have grown soft. Even Karl has a pregnant girlfriend, which comes as a surprise to his Dad. This causes a lot of friction in the family and Maggie has trouble smoothing it over. Karl and his uncle Eric kill the man they think is the informer.

It should end there but his wife is hysterical and threatens to go further. She must then be killed, and Eric pushes her under a car. Then Eric disappears as well and Karl is attacked. Bill is confused at the speed of events and seems undecided how to handle it. London is becoming con-



cerned at the police interest in the disappearances and murders and sends a man to make their concerns known to Bill and Maggie.

As the killings and disappearances keep mounting the tensions within the family grow. One gang member dies (of natural causes?) and another is poisoned. Karl's episodes of rage are becoming more intense, and directed at his father who will still not accept the girlfriend. She also is dragged into the mess and the baby may not be Karl's but one of the dead men may be the father. As the tension builds we can only try to guess who will die next and who will survive. The outcome is unexpected.

The film is a little slow moving at first but soon picks up speed once the characters have been introduced. If I had to find a criticism it would be that the actors mumble and whisper too many of their lines and I was constantly turning up the volume to hear what was going on then hurriedly turning it back down during the loud bits.

This is becoming a common failing in far too many films. Apart from this it is a fine film with well-drawn, well acted characters and a surprisingly good if vicious plot for an independent film. Some of the plot echoes a much earlier British film, Essex Girls, and even a recent Australian film, Animal Kingdom. These films do nasty things to the "family values" ethic so predominant in U.S. films today. This is director Ben Wheatley's first film and with talent like we see here we will be hearing a lot more of him.



Everyman's War
Eagle
Entertainment
R4 DVD

The story is based on Sgt. Don Smith's wartime experiences in the 94th Infantry, especially in the Battle of the Bulge. War weary, the unit was part of a thinly stretched line around the town of Nennig in Germany. Out-gunned, poorly supplied and desperately in need of a break (they had only had a few days R&R since Normandy) they now faced German Panzer divisions. The Allied intelligence officers said the Germans could not attack in the freezing weather. They were wrong.

In a series of flashbacks we see how the soldiers started in the unit. One was evading a prison sentence, one was of American-German origin and had to prove himself to the Americans, and so on. Many were just drafted.

Just before he left the U.S. Smith met a girl called Dorine. He had hopes of something growing from the meeting but his transfer orders came through and within a couple of days he was on his way to Europe. He started to write a letter to Dorine, not sure how it would be received. He never got around to posting the letter, just kept adding to it – his thoughts, his observations of the war, and his fears.

In the constant pressure of combat we see how important a little thing like a letter from home is. We see how personalities change, not always



for the better, especially when one of your buddies is killed. The horrors of war are not only on the U.S side. Smith sees a German prisoner take his own life because his family has gone to the gas chambers and he has nothing left to live for. Smith must face these horrors full on when most of his platoon is dead. He can give up or carry on.

The story is not so much a narrative as a series of events, each one affecting Smith in different ways. It has a lot in common with the feel of Band of Brothers but is on a far more personal level. It is unfair to compare it with Saving Private Ryan because it seems to have been made on a tiny budget.

Despite this it is a strong story, well done. There is the blood and gore you would expect but it is not overdone for effect. This is definitely a war film worth watching.



Farewell
Hopscotch Films
R4 DVD

*French, Russian with
English subtitles*

The story is based on Colonel Grigoriev, an Intelligence officer in a KGB group during the Cold War. His job was to receive incoming intelligence and integrate it with other sources. The final information would then be passed on to the relevant Departments. It was a powerful and responsible position with just about every piece of intelligence received passing through his hands. Grigoriev was disillusioned with Brezhnev's Politburo and where they were leading Russia, so he decided to start passing intelligence to NATO in the hope he could change the direction of his country. He was assigned a code name by the French, Farewell. He was also given a contact, a French engineer temporarily working in Moscow. The engineer, Pierre Froment, was not a spy – he was just a convenient contact point for Grigoriev. The two men gradually developed a friendship. Froment's wife was however suspicious of her husband's new secrecy. When she found out about his espionage duties she urged him to stop as the lives of their two children and herself would now be under threat. Grigoriev's family was also becoming estranged from him and he started an affair with a secretary at work.

French President Mitterand showed the information on America to Ronald Reagan. Reagan's staff was astounded at the level and detail and realised that they had a serious internal espionage problem. Grigoriev then gave them a list of agents working for the Russians against the Americans. With the assassination or arrest of the agents the KGB knew they also had an



agent in their midst and Grigoriev was soon picked up and interrogated. Froment made a desperate dash for the border with his family.

The film is slow on action but strong on motivation and sheer acting skill. Emir Kusturica is brilliant as Grigoriev, depicting him as a strongly patriotic man but rather lonely because of his work. Guillaume Canet as Froment is just as good. His slightly frightened depiction of Froment and his unfamiliarity with the world of espionage are played well, and it is easy to see how a friendship would develop between the two men.

Grigoriev's hope for a new world order partly came true. Reagan committed to the Star Wars project, something that Russian technology could not match. It would have made the Russian missile-based technology obsolete and they had no choice but to withdraw and concentrate on their internal problems rather than on the ideal of Communist world domination. Grigoriev asked nothing for his work except a Queen tape for his son and some good wine for himself.

The steady build-up of tension is magnificent. The near-misses with Security, the need for secrecy, and the problems of cheating on their families all serve to build up the tension and the friendship between the men. The subtitles are not a problem and the genuine language on the soundtrack only adds to the realism of the film. It is not a spy film in the James Bond sense but has a deep underlying sense of grim reality only softened slightly by the wild winter scenery and the comfortable family scenes. The French production values seem to have brought something special to a film about two very brave men.



The Girl Who Leapt Through Time
Kadokawa / Madman
R2 and R4

English overdubbed

OK, it's a teenage love story but it is very nicely done and has a science fiction element that lifts it above the average.



Makito is a teenage girl, a bit of a tomboy really, who is only average at school. She would rather be playing basketball with her two male friends (NOT boyfriends) Chiaki and Kosuki. One day in the science lab she finds a device that allows her to jump backwards in time. She uses it for trivial things at first, like redoing exams until she gets top grades or restarting the morning so she gets to school on time. Then she discovers a sort of tattoo on her arm and it is counting down – there is a limited number of jumps she can make and she has wasted many of them.

Her outlook changes and she starts to use the time leaps for better purposes but it seems interfering with the past has unintended consequences. She uses a leap to set up Kosuki with a girl, but the outcome is they are nearly killed in a train accident and she has to use another of her decreasing number of leaps to save them.

Then she finds there is more to Chiaki than she suspected, and after a lot of false starts they finally admit their feelings for each other. Chiaki has a problem, though, and it can only be resolved by using her last time leap.

The first point that struck me about the film is how expressive Makito's facial features are, given the economy of line and colour of the anime style. It is hard to show much emotion in a two



dimensional character but the artists of Madhouse Studios have managed it. They still stick to the traditional wide oval mouth with little detail when their characters shout or cry, but the subtlety shown in Makito's face as she realises her feelings is far above the norm.

The second point is that Mamoru Hosoda is a fine director. He keeps the action moving and the film doesn't bog down in sentimentality or get puzzling because of the unexplained science of time leaping. Given the strange mixed genre nature of the story this is quite an achievement. The end result is that we can accept time leaping well before the love interest develops. This is important as the two become intertwined.

The film was not particularly popular or well promoted when it was released in 2006, but since then the word has spread and it has something of a cult following. It will come with a second DVD with the usual extras but in this case I will be interested to see how director Hosoda managed such a story within the anime style.

At my somewhat advanced years I generally don't find this sort of story very interesting and I was only attracted by the science fiction element of the title. I was surprised. It is really a very good, human film.



The Horseman
Kastle Films Ltd
Umbrella
Entertainment
Region B , C
BLU RAY



This is one of the most violent films I have seen yet I can't help sympathising with the one who is wreaking violence. I suppose that's the sign of a good revenge film – you understand the feelings and motives of the lead character.

Christian's daughter has died under suspicious circumstances in north Queensland. Her body contains traces of semen, cocaine and heroin. He is sent a porno video of his daughter in what could have been her last minutes and sets out to find out what happened. The first stop is the video wholesaler who is selling the film and from there he leaves a trail of dead people in his wake. Each person leads him to the next. Each person who took part in his daughter's degradation dies - painfully. Along the road in Queensland he picks up a young runaway hitchhiker, Alice. She is heading north to tell her boyfriend she is pregnant. The two become, if not friends, at least traveling mates. Perhaps Christian can see a bit of his dead daughter in Alice – they would be about the same age. Perhaps in Christian Alice sees some sort of father figure.

Along the road Christian continues his campaign of violent retribution. He gradually hones in on Finn, apparently the leader of the gang that makes these films. Finn, however, is now well aware that someone is hunting him. Similarly the police are hunting for Christian on suspicion of



the murders.

As he interrogates each victim Christian is discovering things about his daughter that he would rather not have known, but he suspects she is as much a victim of the pornographers as of her own stupidity.

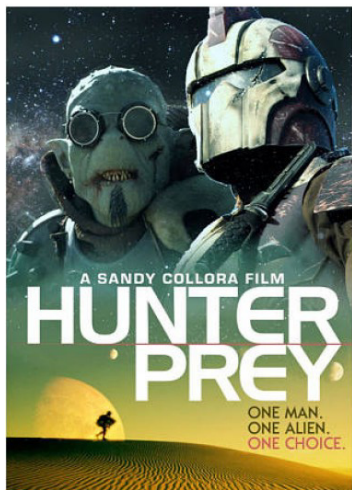
Finally he comes face to face with Finn. Finn has the upper hand and will make Christian suffer, but not before he has had some fun with Alice.

There is not a bad actor in the whole film. The screenplay has been written to give each character time to develop, but the film doesn't bog down. It was filmed in high definition and it's nice to see a film that remains sharp even during the night scenes. A film as violent as this won't be to everyone's taste, but it really is a fine piece of drama.



Hunter Prey
Sony Pictures
R4 DVD

Don't expect any deep moments of philosophy from this film. What you get is a great fiction story somewhat in the simple linear style of Star Wars but with twists and turns at the end that make it far less innocent than it looks.



The alien spaceship Prometheus has crash-landed on a desert planet. The ship's computer has sent out a distress call but it will be some time before help arrives. Meanwhile the earthman prisoner the ship was carrying has escaped and a group of soldiers is tasked to recapture him. One by one the Earthman picks them off until only he and the alien Lieutenant are left. We learn a little of the history of the war between their planets as they talk by radio while hunting each other.

The Earthman is important to the aliens because he knows the whereabouts of a freighter full of explosives heading for the alien home planet. He is also important to a bounty hunter who sees a lot of money to be made. Nobody suspects that the alien is also important to the Earthman. The relationship between the hunter and hunted shifts constantly.

The film is beautifully crafted, pinpoint sharp and well lit. The CGI is seamless and is not over-used. The sets, costumes and weapons are well



made and credible. Even the dialogue is sensible and the alien speaks English, not some form of pidgin English designed to sound trendy. The film was made for under \$500,000 but there is no evidence of budget shortcuts - a tribute to the crew.

This all makes it easy to concentrate of the plot. The result is a very enjoyable film. Director Sandy Collora, despite his relatively short career in directing films, has produced a film as good as the great days of SF films in the 1980s.

Interplanetary
Crewless
Productions
Shock-O-Rama
Cinema
R1 DVD

I am not entirely sure what sort of film Director Chance Shirley intended with Interplanetary.



It looks just serious enough to be a pretty fair





budget B-grade SF film, with excellent cinematography, but has enough tongue-in-cheek humour to make a good but subtle spoof.

The plot is that old standard – Mars Base 2 is menaced by a flesh-eating monster, as usual, but the planet is supposed to be devoid of life. As well as the monster there is a group of homicidal spacemen to deal with, and a mysterious fossil that may or may not have something to do with the increasing body count. The corporation that owns the mission seems to have ulterior motives and doesn't provide any support.

It's the people who really make the film what it is – the fussy base administrator who is out of her depth if a problem isn't listed in the book, the nerdy computer programmer who wears a tie (on Mars?) and has difficulty passing a mirror, the female crewman who is screwing her way



through every male on the Base and seems to suffer from that terrible affliction, not enough clothes; and the monster who is the conventional man-in-the-rubber-suit.

Nitpickers will love the film. From the Earth-based administrator who can travel to Mars in a couple of hours to the large amount of corrugated iron used in the buildings the film is full of blatant errors, unlikely science and unbelievable sets. The entrance to the base appears to be a sheet of board leaning against the hill, with bits of rock glued to it. The Moon Buggy is a stripped-down Volkswagen chassis sporting a tank of Trichlorofluoromethane, an ozone-depleting gas of absolutely no use at all on a moon buggy. If everything had to be transported across space, why bring individual lockers and computer desks? And, of course, badly painted corrugated iron?

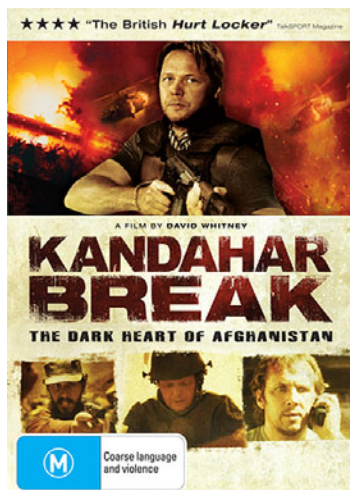
I quickly came to regard the film as a spoof and on that basis it was a lot of fun. As budget SF it's not bad either.



Kandahar Break
Thriller
Anchor Bay
Entertainment
R4 DVD

Set in post-Russian Taliban Afghanistan, this independent British film shows many of the problems of such a backward area. Richard Lee is a mine clearance expert whose company has been hired by the Taliban government to clear the old Russian minefields. To help his small team he has hired Jamilah, an American-educated Pakistani woman, as interpreter. The variety of Islam practiced in these areas is one of the most severe and unreasoning. Richard finds this out when he is nearly shot after urinating within thirty metres of a tent that has a tribesman's wife inside. When he hired Jamilah he also hired her brother and his wife, as a single woman if not accompanied by a relative will be stoned to death as a prostitute. Richard is falling in love with Jamilah, and she with him.

When her brother is blown up in a minefield Richard will not be allowed to continue to employ her. He visits her one night to plead with her to accompany him across the border to Pakistan but they are seen by an informer for the corrupt police chief, Ashiq Khan. He orders Jamilah to be stoned without benefit of a trial. The shariya court that will legalise her fate is a group of villagers who are being urged on by Ashiq



Khan's men. Richard rescues her, but she dies from her injuries. In retaliation Richard shoots Ashiq Khan accidentally. Now Ashiq Khan is after him. He must flee to Pakistan where the Pakistani military at least keeps the Taliban under control.

Unequipped, with no water, still being hunted by Ashiq Khan's men, and no idea how he will cross the border, Richard looks like dying until he is saved by Omar, an "import – export" specialist – a smuggler. Omar's group are no friends of the Taliban and guide Richard to safety. They get him across the border with bribes in the appropriate places, but just as Richard thinks he is free one of Ashiq Khan's men who has been relentlessly following him shoots him.

The story will not end there.

David Whitney's film shows many of the problems of living under a totalitarian regime run by corrupt power-hungry people. It is not critical of Islam, only of the people who use the religion for their own power. The people of Afghanistan are generally treated sympathetically. It is only the corrupt ones who do not show up well in the film – the police and their network of informants and thugs in this case. This problem of the corruption existing at the top is by no means unique to Afghanistan.

Whitney does not preach at us, though. He may highlight some of the more ridiculous elements of the culture as part of the story but that's all. It is a harsh culture for a harsh country, as the wonderful cinematography of the mountain country shows. Love between members of different cultures in these circumstances will always be hard.



**Lawnmower Man &
Lawnmower Man 2:
Beyond Cyberspace
Beyond Home En-
ertainment
R4 DVD**

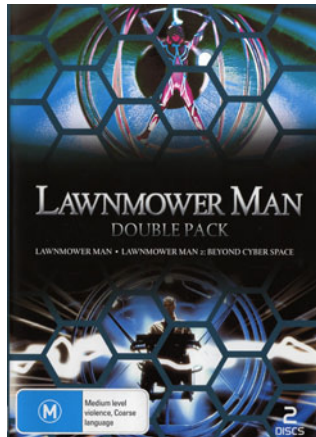
*"By the turn of the mil-
lennium a technology
known as VIRTUAL
REALITY will be
in widespread use. It
will allow you to enter
computer generated
artificial*

*worlds as unlimited as the imagination itself. Its
creators foresee
millions of positive uses - while others fear it as
a new form of mind
control..."*

In 1982 the film Tron from Walt Disney Produc-
tions astounded the world with its incredible (for
then) use of computer graphics. It was the story
of a man who was absorbed (we would now use
"digitized") into a computer system. For most
people it was their introduction to the world of
computer-created Virtual Reality. In 1992
Lawnmower Man was released, not quite a copy
of Tron but borrowing heavily from it and explor-
ing the VR concept in more detail.

Dr Angelo is working on VR interfaces in the
secret lab, where he has done some promising
work with a chimpanzee. His concept is that
VR can be used to train the human brain in new
concepts and to improve itself. His employer's
concept is that VR can be used to train soldiers
rapidly and have their aggression levels manip-
ulated. In this they have so far been successful.

Dr Angelo also has a setup in his basement at
home where he and one of the neighbourhood
kids fly through VR worlds just for fun.



The lawnmower man of the title is Jobe, a ra-
ther simple-minded but likeable young man who
mows the Doctor's lawn. One day Dr Angelo
hooks him up to the VR setup and the results
are amazing. Under the VR tuition his mind re-
trains itself and he learns at an astronomical
rate. The previously downtrodden young man is
now more self-aware. He cleans himself up and
looks more presentable, he beats up the priest
who has been abusing him for years, and he
discovers the joys of women.

Dr Angelo takes him into the lab where the
owner of the company sees him in action. He
has blocked experiments on humans before but
now he wants the program accelerated. Under
the influence of the more powerful lab VR com-
puters Jobe has now developed a sort of God
complex and seeks revenge on those who have
hurt him in the past.

"The universe is mine. I am God here"

Dr Angelo realizes he has created a monster.
He shuts off access to the outer world from the
lab computers to trap Jobe inside the system.
Then the chimp breaks loose and almost de-
stroys the lab. Jobe finds one open connection
and escapes the lab into a wider computer sys-
tem just in time. The lab is destroyed.





Lawnmower Man 2 picks up some years in the future. The VR world is now a huge network spread across many computer systems – communications, train control systems, everything connects to every other system. Jobe is still inside the system, but his old physical self is now crippled and legless following the destruction of the lab. Dr Angelo has retired into obscurity.

Remember the kid next door? He is now a member of a hacker group whose specialty is breaking into VR using hijacked accounts. He meets Jobe again, who asks him to contact the Doctor. The VR world is under threat and only Dr Angelo can work out the problem. Jobe is repairing it as best he can but it can't hold forever. As enticement he has almost finished building a Chronos chip, the chip that will be implanted into soldiers to place them under computer control.

If they have the same effect on the soldiers that VR had on Jobe it should allow a race of enhanced, fast-learning soldiers free of the wires and lab support needed at present to enter VR.



Jobe is on a real power trip – in fact he appears to have let his God complex take full control – and with his ability to enter and control any computer system in the world he can punish any attempt at thwarting him. Only a mysterious piece of code codenamed Egypt is holding him back. Dr Angelo knows what it is but isn't telling. There will be a battle of wits between Jobe and Dr Angelo with the fate of the human world at stake.

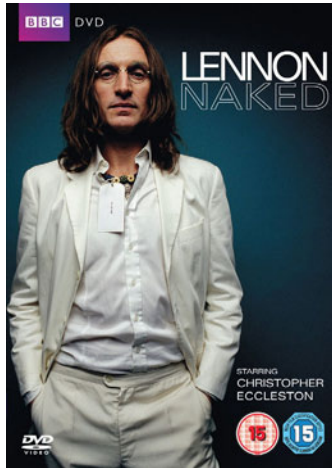
It sounds good, but the first film had obvious borrowings from Tron that downgraded it a little. In the second film it was more obvious, with touches of Max Headroom, a BBC show that ran in 1987 and 1988. The Wow! factor was allowed to overcome the plot, with extended but not altogether necessary shots of, for instance, a train crash. The plot is also a little ponderous, but the film was saved by good directing, good acting and its appeal to teenage kids.

The two films have been cleaned up and compiled into this single pack. They may seem a little old-fashioned now, but VR is still in its infancy and has not yet achieved the level shown in the films. There is plenty of life in the Lawnmower Man yet.



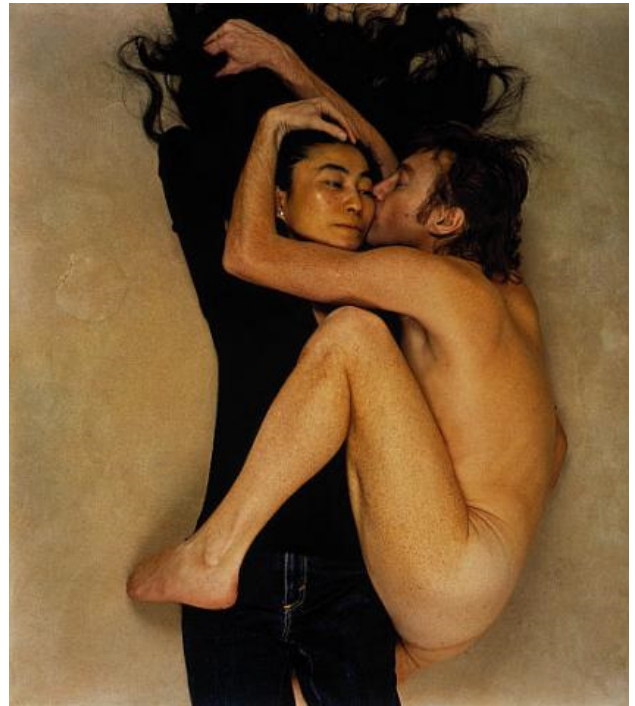
Lennon Naked
BBC
Roadshow
R4 DVD

Lennon Naked is a remarkable piece of docudrama. Christopher Eccleston is eminently believable as Lennon, Christopher Fairban as his father and Naoko Mori as Yoko Ono.



The film primarily focuses on Lennon and his own emotionally charged journey, with the Beatles in the background. This is an unusual approach as most films on John Lennon place the Beatles centre stage. This exploration of his difficult childhood, tortured emotional life, close friendships such as with Brian Epstein and relationships is incredibly visceral and moving.

In 1964 John Lennon very reluctantly agrees to



meet his father who seemingly abandoned him some seventeen years before. With the press in attendance it doesn't go well. John as a very close to Brian who is a closeted homosexual, a short time later Brian either committed suicide or died of an accidental drug overdose. His death shook Lennon and so he tries to rekindle his relationship with his father, Freddie. His father is a heavy drinker and once again things don't go well.

John is trying to make a success of his marriage to Cynthia but she wants a normal privileged rich life while John is far more of an outsider. After a series of strange notes from a fan, Yoko Ono, they meet and develop a relationship.

In the Sixties this causes a terrible stir, cele-



brated musician leaves wife and son for Asian girlfriend, the racist media does not help. As Vietnam unfolds Lennon and Ono do various art protests including Lennon returning his M.B.E in protest against England's involvement in the war.

Apple Corps, their music company, does well at first but with the strange turn in the Beatles music, the White Album, and John's erratic personal and political behaviour it begins to go down the tubes.

The film focuses on Lennon's emotional life and offers a brutally honest portrayal of a truly brilliant musician plagued by emotional suffering, doubts and depression. It does not attempt to whitewash Lennon and portrays him honestly as a damaged genius at times hurts others as much as was hurt. His creativity came at an incredible cost and it is interesting to see a documentary that explores his life in such honest terms. At the same time Lennon Naked captures the impish humour and amazing wit that Lennon had throughout his life and is a joy to watch.

Lost City Raiders
Pinnacle Films
R4 DVD

This film starts out well as a good adventure thriller. Unfortunately about halfway through it loses its religious theme and starts to become New Age. By the end it is just getting silly. The pseudo-religious approach worked well in Indiana Jones but only partly works in Lost City Raiders.

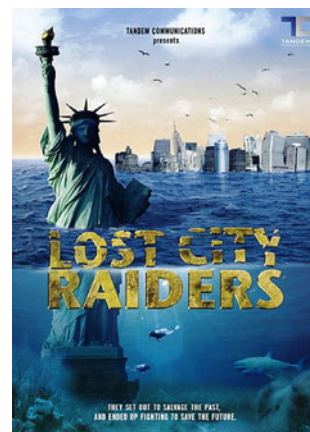
It is 2048 and most of the world is flooded by a rise in sea level. A father and his two sons run a salvage business, rescuing artefacts and valuables from the sunken cities. They are taken on

by the New Vatican to find a mysterious sceptre from very early times. The sceptre can control the water levels on the planet. Each time they think they have the sceptre they find only another clue to its whereabouts.

They also have a rival – a real estate magnate who wants to raise the sea levels to cover the remaining land and force people to buy his floating homes. We are given no clue about what they will eat when the last land is covered by water. A young priest in the New Vatican is passing information to the magnate. He claims "You cannot stop the Rising. It is an event foretold by the Scriptures. It will herald the Second Coming". So far, so good, but Jesus had better be able to swim.

They find the sceptre and follow the clues to a huge cave complex. Now it starts to get silly. This cave complex apparently has the capacity to hold the world's excess water, and the water can be directed into the caves by moving the continental plates. A supposed scientist explains it as manipulating "cosmic energy convergence points". They "activate the pressure point to shift the tectonic plates", the caves are opened up and water starts rushing in. Has the world now been saved?

Leaving out the plot deficiencies, it is a good thriller film. The acting is a bit rough in places and most of the characters are rather two-dimensional, but the CGI is outstanding and mostly very believable. Suspend your disbelief, sit back and enjoy the film.



**Man of Violence (aka Moon)
Gangster Thriller
BFI Flipside
Blu Ray
Region B**

This film was also released as Moon in 1968. The new title Man of Violence seems to have been added later. The style of the film owes a bit to James Bond films but director Pete Walker turned it into a gangster film rather than a spy one. Walker was an independent producer for many years, getting his start in the early soft-core porn genre. He also dabbled in horror films, once again with a healthy amount of seminudity. Man of Violence is typical of his work. The film was not particularly well known in its day but now BFI has re-released it we can once again enjoy what was for its day a well-made drama. It holds up against the modern product remarkably well.

The plot involves a playboy criminal, Moon. He is hired by a London gangster, Bryant, to find out what a rival gangster, Grayson, is up to. On the surface it seems to be a war between two property-developer criminals. Moon finishes up working for both. Moon is tough enough to handle the job but he still manages to get beaten up a number of times.

Enter the absolutely lovely Luan Peters as Angel. She is representing a foreign government who wants 30 million pounds worth of stolen



gold recovered. It is being smuggled to England to buy guns from the gangster Grayson to stage a revolution in a Middle East country. Moon learns that the two gangsters are not just rival property developers, they are both after the gold. Moon has been double-crossed, triple-crossed, beaten up and is in mortal danger. Should he trust Angel? If so, how can he recover the money for her?

The film is beautifully made with the scenes in Tunis particularly capturing the squalid and overpopulated cities. One weak point is the music. It is that squawking, brassy type of music that worked in Bond films but is overused in Man of Violence. Do we, for instance, need such music for a car pulling up at a hotel?

Otherwise the film is a great example of an early British gangster film. It is well acted, well filmed, and the plot has enough twists and turns to satisfy Guy Ritchie. The transfer from the original masters is almost flawless. The film is well worth watching again, if only for Luan Peters.

A nice touch in the extras is Pete Walker's The Big Switch. This is another good gangster film and its inclusion makes the DVD particularly good value with two top gangster films for the price..



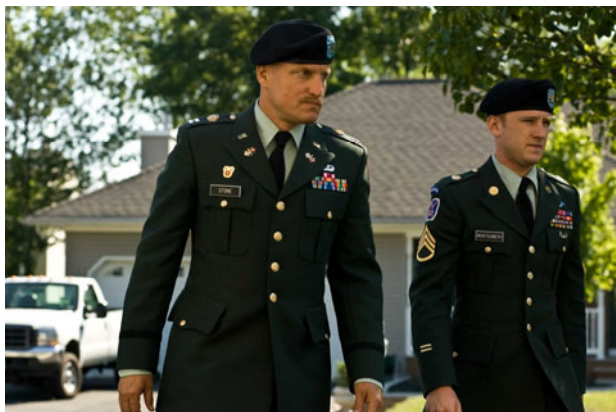
The Messenger Madman R4 DVD

This is a surprisingly sensitive and human film to come from a U.S. studio. I didn't think they had it in them and I certainly wouldn't have picked Woody Harrelson as a lead actor. It all comes together, though, and director Oren Moverman has put together a fine film dealing with a rarely-mentioned part of a war.



Staff Sergeant Will Montgomery was recently injured in Iraq and only has a few months to go before he is demobilised. He is transferred to Colonel Dorsett's Casualty Notification Team to serve out his time. These men and women are the ones who must notify the next-of-kin (NOK) of the death in combat of their son or daughter. It is a difficult job because they do not know how the NOK will react. They are not trained in grief counselling; their job is just to deliver the message in a compassionate way then get out. It is described as "hit and git". There is a code of behaviour. Don't touch the NOK. Don't talk of "the deceased – they have a name."

Will is teamed up with the experienced Captain Tony Stone, a man who has seen action and has been in the Notification team for a long time. He knows the rules they follow are for their own good. Will soon finds out why. He faces reactions from hysteria to abuse to the girl who hasn't told her father she was married because he hated her boyfriend. Although he feels compassion for these people he must follow the rules.

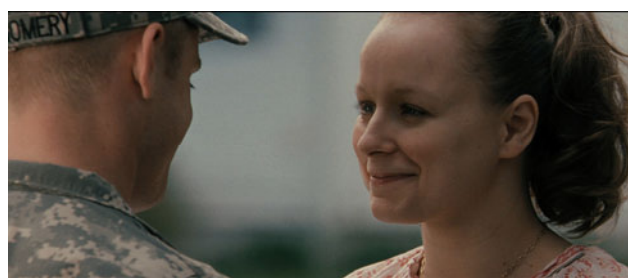


One day he delivers the bad news to a young woman who takes it better than usual – their marriage may have been on the verge of breakdown anyway. The hardest part would be explaining to her young son why his daddy won't be coming home. Will commits the great sin – he becomes involved with the woman in spite of his training and Stone's disapproval.

He and Stone are becoming closer as they go about their sad job. They begin to spend time together when off duty and we find both have some emotional baggage of their own. Will has even considered suicide. As he becomes more aware of his own problems, he can now confront the problem of the young woman with whom he is involved.

The film not only highlights the grief of the next-of-kin, it also shows how relatively unprepared the soldiers themselves are for delivering their dreadful message. Woody Harrelson and Ben Foster give powerful performances that leave us believing that there must be a better way to do this job. There are no political speeches, no appeals to God, just a pair of war-damaged soldiers doing the hardest job of all.

The film was a budget production and didn't sit too well with U.S. audiences. Perhaps it was too close to home, since these good citizens voted for the politicians who sent the youngsters off to war in the first place. Perhaps they don't like to be reminded of that. In that case the film is timely and worth watching.



Riot
Thriller
Paramount Pictures
DVD release by Olive
Films
R0

Dating back to 1968, this gritty film shows that some of the older films could do a superb job without SFX. Too many of these films are being "remade" and often turn out badly in comparison with the originals.

Partly the success of the film is due to superb acting by Gene Hackman and Jim Brown, both looking considerably younger. Although Hackman's acting career only began in 1961 this film shows the ability that has kept him in film work for the rest of his life. Jim Brown's career runs somewhat parallel to Hackman's. He started acting in 1964 after a bout in professional football. His first really successful film was *The Dirty Dozen* (1967) so making him a lead character in *Riot* was still a bit of a risk for a producer. It worked, and he turned in a powerful performance.

The plot would now be regarded as fairly conventional but it was adventurous for its day. We have a prison in Arizona run by a ruthless warden and managed day to day by equally ruthless guards. Cully Preston (Brown) is doing five years and shortly will have a chance of parole. Victimised by a warden, he is taken to solitary. In solitary a group of prisoners has just taken over the wing. Cully manages to save the warders from being murdered by some of the more vicious prisoners. Whether he likes it or not, he is involved now.



"Big Red" Fraker (Hackman) is the leader and has an escape plan of sorts but to create a diversion he organises a "protest" against conditions in the prison. He presents a list of inmates' demands. There is strategy in this. If it is declared as a "riot" the warden can respond with deadly force. As a "protest" there can be no violent intercession and the negotiations will give him the time he needs to finish digging a tunnel.

Cully remains the voice of reason, protecting the warders and trying to temper the excesses of the prisoners. He gains time by making a batch of "raisinjack" a highly alcoholic drink that leaves most of the inmates drunk or unconscious. Unfortunately the Warden sees Cully with Big Red and now believes Cully is one of the leaders. Cully, rather than just sitting out his sentence, knows he will be jailed for a much longer period. His only alternative is to escape with the others. There are still many things that can go wrong with the escape plan, and they do.

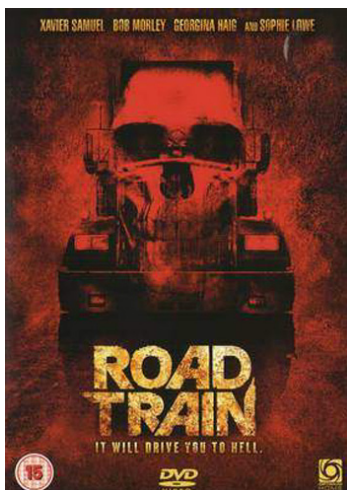
Regardless of its age *Riot* is a good film with strong personalities, a quite credible plot and steady action all the way through. See this original film before it is "remade"



Road Train
Pinnacle Films
DVD and BluRay
Australia

Road Train is another one of those films that definitely won't be used for tourist promotion in Australia. In fact there is even a sly dig at the recent "Where the hell are you" tourist advertisement. While there are elements of *Duel* and *Wolf Creek* the film stands by itself as a top piece of terror. Building on the background of disappearing tourists and backpackers throughout Australia's Outback, the film adds a supernatural aspect. With the recent conviction of serial killer Ivan Milat, who preyed on these backpackers, the film's basic story is quite believable.

Four friends set off on a camping holiday in Central Australia. Along the lonely highway they are menaced by a huge road train, a semitrailer pulling two large trailers. They crash and one of the boys, Craig, suffers a broken arm. The road train stops and when they catch up with it they are surprised to find there is no driver. They jump in and are just driving off when a man waving a gun runs out of the bush. They keep going and somehow Marcus, the one doing the driving, nods off during the night. In the morning they are on a dirt road in the middle of nowhere. Marcus can't get the truck to start again – it is



apparently out of fuel - so he and Nina set off to go back to the highway for help. Marcus is also becoming a little hypnotised by the truck's bonnet ornament, a three headed dog that could represent Cerberus, the ancient guardian of the underworld. It is invading his dreams and his imagination but he says nothing to the others. The purpose of Cerberus was to prevent souls leaving Hades after they had crossed over. This seems to be the friends' problem – once they stepped into the truck they don't seem able to get away from it.

When they reach the highway the man with the gun reappears, demanding to know where his truck is. He appears mentally disturbed rather than homicidal. From here things only get worse. There is more going on than a murderous truckie. Craig's broken arm miraculously heals. When Nina finally opens one of the containers on the road train trailer there is something dreadful inside.

The film probably has more in common with *Mad Max* than with *Duel* – the same savage and irrational violence, the same sense of isolation of the heroine. If it was just a road trip film it would still be good viewing but the supernatural slant makes it exceptional.

"You didn't take the truck. The truck took you."



Saxon
Peccadillo Pictures
R2 DVD

Eddie is a man in trouble. Recently out of prison, he has run foul of a loan shark who has taken one eye out with a knife and will take Eddie's other eye if he doesn't settle up quickly.



Eddie's last chance is to borrow the money from an old friend, Kevin, who has recently had a big win on a TV quiz show. Eddie and Kevin grew up as a pair of tearways on the old Saxon housing estate. It is now being looked at for an extension of the airport and the tenants of the Council flats are being squeezed out.

The Council will make a lot of money on the Saxon deal and has employed a group of thugs called "The Bailiffs" to scare out the last tenants. One of these is Kevin's wife Linda. Kevin himself is missing and Linda hires Eddie to find him.

Strangely nobody on the estate will talk about Kevin. It is not that they dislike his brutal ways, although he is still as rough as ever, but they are desperately afraid of the Bailiffs. Why are the Bailiffs looking for Kevin? Once it becomes known that Eddie is looking for Kevin too, he becomes a target for the Bailiffs as well as the moneylender. He has quietened down since his period in prison and can't handle the violence suddenly visited on him. He is bashed, stapled,



kicked, and generally given a hard time.

There is a small amount of support for him on the estate but as soon as it is known someone is helping him they get a visit from the Bailiffs. Finally Eddie realises he must kill or be killed.

This is a violent and bloody film in the best British traditions. I can see why it would be heavily cut before release, but this version is a great piece of cinema in spite of the violence. It is well acted, tightly directed and edited, and thankfully does not all take place in gloom and darkness. Sean Harris as Eddie shows his growing acting experience even though his part as written is a little flat. This is Director Greg Loftin's debut and he shows tremendous potential. It may be low budget but doesn't show it. In the British crime genre this is an outstanding example.



The Secret in Their Eyes
Madman
R4 DVD

Spanish with English subtitles

Benjamin Esposito is a retired policeman. To fill in his time he is writing a book on one of his old cases. It was a vicious rape and murder and, although a young thug named Gomez confessed to it, he was let out of prison early for informing on other prisoners. This does not satisfy Esposito, the woman's husband or Irena, the female Prosecutor in his Court for whom he has deep but unvoiced feelings.

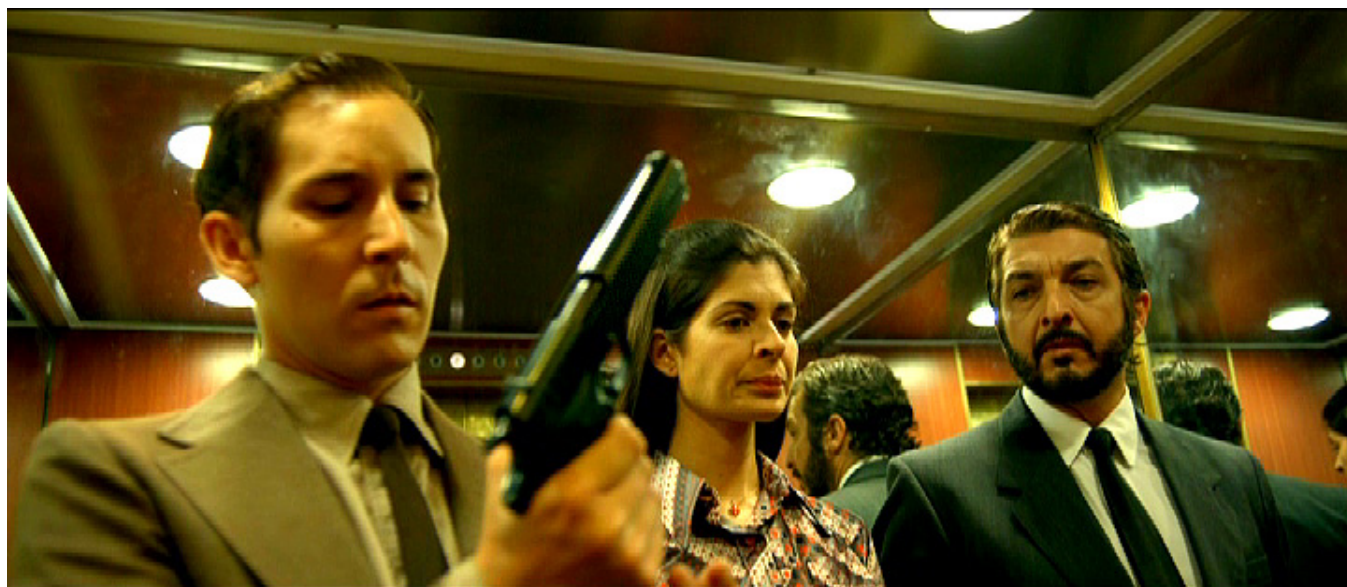
As he reads his case notes from twenty five years ago he decides to revisit the case. The problem is, Gomez is no longer to be found despite now having some sort of high level protection from the police as a reward for his informing. Is he just missing, in hiding or something else?

Esposito visits the victim's husband. He learns a lot from the man, who points out that after twenty five years even his wife's memory has begun to fade. Perhaps it is better to live in the present rather than the past. Esposito must review his own life and decide how to manage what's left of it.



The film is a deep examination of human motives and in spite of being a crime film it is mercifully free of car chases and unnecessary violence. That's not to say it is free of violence, but what is there is relevant to the plot and strengthens the story rather than turns it into a bloodfest. The subtitles are a bit rough in their translation but still manage to convey the deep feelings quite well. Ricardo Darin (Esposito) and Soledad Villamil (Irena) are strong actors, but perhaps the best character is Guillermo Francella who plays Sandoval, Esposito's offside – drunk, irreverent, but prone to flashes of insight that justify him in his job.

It's a good film even with subtitles. Watch it now



Skyline Cinema Release

Skyline is a return to the good old days of alien invasion films but with the very best in special effects. There are great ships, all manner of strange smaller craft and horrific creatures. It is, however, different from many Hollywood alien movies in that it removes the loud military message and replaces it with a focus on a small group of individual trying to survive within a tower block. It gives little detail as to how the aliens are or what they want, indeed you own realize what they are doing with the bodies they collect a fair way into the film.

Arriving in Los Angeles to visit old friend/hip-hop partner Terry (Donald Faison), Jarrod (Eric Balfour) and girlfriend Elaine (Scottie Thompson) are immediately impressed with his high end apartment. It is Terry's birthday and they party the night away with the mandatory interpersonal crisis including Elaine revealing she is pregnant and Terry offering Jarrod a job and asking him to return to L.A.

Early in the morning something strange occurs; blue lights appear in the night sky which look a bit like ball lightning and fall towards earth. As they shine through the blinds of the apartment they burn or brand those whom they touch and places them under some sort of control. Each of the contactees are then beamed up into the



craft. One of their guests is taken but luckily for Jarrod he is pulled back just in time but not because quite a long exposure, something which proves very significant at the conclusion of the film.

As the bluelights collect up vast numbers of humans for processing, large ships appear in the sky releasing vast numbers of smaller crafts which seem to be semi-organic. These "monster like" craft attack the city Godzilla style crushing buildings and searching for organic matter to consumer. An attempt to escape is made but with disastrous results and the tension created as the small group try and survive in the small apartment is impressive. Since Jarrod has been somehow changed by the aliens he is able to battle against them and there are some great one-on-one battles.

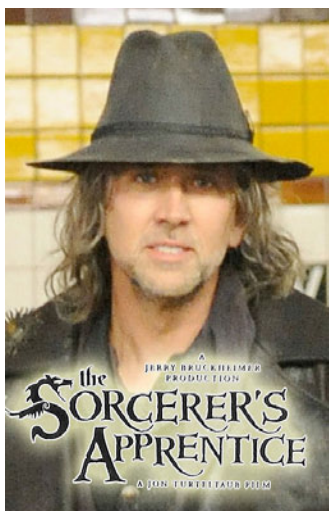
This is a film with many obvious influences, from Independence Day to H.G. Wells War of the Worlds, even lesser known films such as From Beyond have influenced scenes such as the "brain gobbling sequences". While it may play homage to many sci fi films Skyline does so in a very energetic manner and ends up as a very fast paced sci fi monster film with lots of interesting elements. It is also a very dark film with the majority of the heroic figures being killed and this is unusual for a mainstream sci fi release. The ending, while obviously a setup for a sequel, is well thought out and very different from what one would expect.

Skyline is a very different science fiction film and stands out from the majority of films currently on the big screen. I highly recommend it.



**Sorcerer's
Apprentice
Walt Disney
Studios
R4 DVD**

This film is notable to me for a number of reasons. First, it shows just what a bad state the U.S. film industry is in. They are taking older films, classics in some cases, and revamping them for new issue. This is not always bad because some of the early realisations of good stories were pretty woeful. Secondly I like Nicolas Cage as an actor.



His early career wasn't spectacular and it was only in 1997 with *Conair* that he started to come to notice. With *National Treasure* (2004) his career really took off and he showed that he could do good character roles. His slightly hesitant, retiring acting style suited the part of a shy historian well. *Kickass* (2010) was possibly not the best film he ever made but it was lots of fun. Again his acting style was a perfect contrast to his wisecracking daughter and the brash young wannabe superhero.

Now he is back as Balthazar, a sorcerer who is one of Merlin's three apprentices. The evil apprentice Horvath (Alfred Molina plays the evil part well) betrayed his master to Morgana, the powerful sorceress. The other apprentice, Veronica, saved Horvath by taking the spirit of Morgana into her own body. Horvath reluctantly imprisoned the two of them in the Grimhold, a prison whose earthly manifestation is a set of nested dolls. Over the years many sorcerers



have tried to take the Grimhold but Balthazar has caught and imprisoned them as well. If the doll is opened all the evil sorcerers the world has known will be released.

Merlin foretold that there would be a Prime Merlinian, a powerful sorcerer who could destroy the evil forces hidden in the Grimhold. Balthazar has protected it so far while he searches for this man. He has kept a low profile whole doing so and the part suits Cage's acting really well.





Ten year old Dave comes across Balthazar one day and Balthazar thinks Dave may be the Prime Merlinian. He tests Dave with Merlin's dragon ring and the ring wraps itself around Dave's finger, signifying its acceptance of him as merlin's successor.

Unfortunately Dave is only a schoolkid and it is ten more years before he and Balthazar meet again. Dave is now a physics student and teacher. He works on high voltage electricity. Balthazar convinces Dave to learn magic and begin his training. Dave doesn't believe in magic at first but Horvath has been accidentally freed from the Grimhold and he certainly does. He pursues Balthazar and Dave. Then he threatens Dave's girlfriend. Bad move.

The film has little to do with Disney's animated *Sorcerer's Apprentice* (1940) starring Mickey Mouse. There is a not-so-subtle scene where

Dave tries to use magic to get his brooms and mops to clean his lab, as in the original animation, but this film has a completely different script. It has nothing to do with the Goethe poem on which the animated version was based. In many ways it is just a standard American film based on a foreign legend (as was the original) but sometimes they get it right and produce a good piece of cinema. This film is one of the good ones.

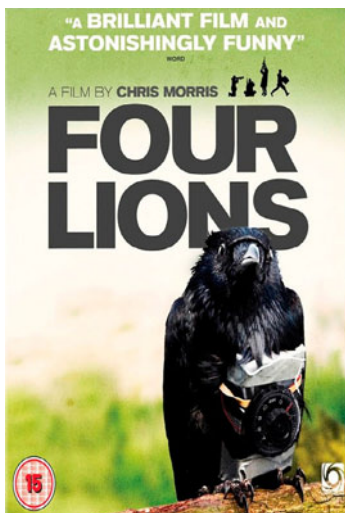
The CGI is excellent, the acting is good and the performances credible. There are some great holes in the science but you overlook that and just enjoy the film. It is traditional Disney in that both the parents and the kids will enjoy it, even if it is aimed more at the teenage market. I am long past my teens, but even I thought it was great watching.



Four Lions
Hopscotch /
Roadshow
Entertainment
R4 DVD

Omar and his friends Waj, Fessal and Barry want to become suicide bombers. They are British Pakistanis living in Sheffield, not normally seen as a target environment for jihadis. Barry, the unofficial head of the group, is a self-important control freak who is also a bumbling incompetent. He is not Pakistani but talks the political talk. He can turn any problem into an anti-Jewish tirade. When his car breaks down due to his mechanical incompetence, he rages "Jews invented spark plugs to control global traffic." Waj, Omar's best friend, is a bit dim – his plan involves fitting bombs to crows, getting them to fly to the target and then detonating their bomb by telephone. The result is a bit rough on the crow. Fessal is not particularly bright but is perhaps the most rational after Omar. He makes the bombs.

Omar's wife is in agreement with her husband for some reason – perhaps because it annoys Omar's brother who is a fanatical Moslem to the point that he locks his wife in a cupboard for disobedience or insolence. Even his young son agrees with his father's ambition – "You'll be in



Heaven before your head hits the ceiling". They both agree that Omar can do anything he sets his mind to.

Omar plans to bomb the London Marathon although there is conflict in the group as to whether there are better targets, like a mosque. This was Barry's suggestion. Although he describes himself as a Moslem he won't enter a mosque. Omar has to point out that this will be hard to explain to Allah when they get to Paradise. In the face of Barry's loud confrontational style the leadership gradually and unofficially lands on Omar.

Jihad is not a popular subject. It is almost taboo to mention it. By raising questions about the jihadis and their motivations this film brings the subject into the open where it can be examined and discussed. By doing so in a humorous way it is non-threatening and tends not to arouse the conventional stereotype reactions.

Don't think that this film is all comedy. Looking deeper we see Barry as the bigoted racist secure in his ignorance.





Waj is a caricature of the terrorist bomber, the one we would like to think will blow himself up rather than innocent people. When he does manage to blow himself up by tripping over a sheep, though, it is rather a sad point. As an individual he was a nice enough guy, even likable. Omar is not the dedicated anti-British terrorist of the newspapers either, just a man who feels he must do what he has to do to benefit his people.

The comedy is not at the expense of Muslims, terrorists or British. It walks a thin line between lampooning these people and trying to explain what their motives are. The film will probably attract censure because it humanises the terrorists, although it does ridicule the motives of suicide bombers generally. It will probably attract censure from Moslems because it will be seen to lampoon them, although it really doesn't. If anything is lampooned in the film it is the attitudes of stupid, bigoted people – on both sides.

It is a very dark comedy on a very tragic problem but doesn't pull any punches and gets its message across without being too offensive.



The Last Remake of Beau Geste Second Sight R2 DVD

Marty Feldman was one of the early British comedians to break the mould of "traditional" humour and move British comedy into a more ridiculous level. Although Feldman did a lot of early writing with and for the group that eventually became Monty Python, he and Tim Brooke-Taylor opted to go their own way. He had some success with a TV show of his own and wrote sketches for many of the other comedians of the time. It was only a matter of time before he moved to films.

His first attempt was *The Bed-Sitting Room* (1969) which was mildly funny but not particularly impressive. I have always like his obscure second film, *Every Home Should Have One* (1970) in which he plays an advertising executive whose job is to make Mackenzie's Frozen Porridge look sexy. At the time this film did rather well and he went on to other classics like *Young Frankenstein* (1974) and *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes' Smarter Brother* (1975). His early comedy work and his later films were, while funny, also aimed at lampooning the British upper classes. You may remember the Class Sketch in which John Cleese, Ronnie Barker and Ronnie Corbett stand in descending order of height to represent their various class origins. So the stage was set for that ultimate spoof on class, honour and stiff upper lip, *The Last Remake of Beau Geste*.

The film's plot need only be recounted briefly since the film has been remade and shown so often. Beau and Digby Geste are sons of the wealthy, randy and totally insane Lord Hector Geste, played brilliantly by Trevor Howard.



Beau knows he has been brought up to be a hero (dead, if necessary) and Digby also dreams of heroic deeds. Sir Hector is dying, possibly helped by his new wife (Ann-Margret). One evening the fabulous sapphire that is the base of the family's fortune is stolen. The next day Beau is gone but leaves a letter admitting to the theft. To avoid any embarrassment to the family by having the police called in, he has run away to join the French Foreign Legion. Digby (Feldman) takes off after him to persuade him to return and face the music as an honourable man would.

Their money-hungry stepmother also sets out independently to retrieve the sapphire. She enlists the help of Beau's one-legged commanding officer (Peter Ustinov) and the sadistic sergeant (Roy Kinnear). There are a lot of visual jokes about blind cooks, used camel salesmen, Frenchmen and Germans and false legs. There are lovely little minor parts, such as Spike Milligan as Crumble the Butler who takes Lord Hector's three-legged bulldog for a walk at night on a little wagon.

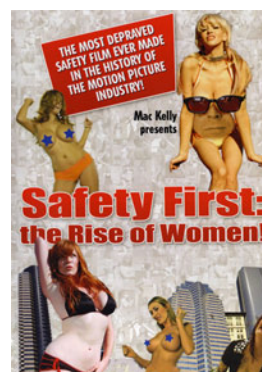
The best part of the film is that the actors looked happy hamming up their roles for all they were worth. Actors like Ustinov and Howard were not known as comedy actors but in this film they gave it all they could and seemed to be having a great time.

Frenchmen in general are not treated with any respect at all. Even the theme song that comes on before the main menu parodies Frenchmen with a final chorus of "we'll kill all the wives and rape all the men". Feldman went on to make three more films before his death. The third, *Yellowbeard* (1983) was possibly his best but Beau Geste runs a very close second. It is a pleasure to see Second Sight releasing his films so we can appreciate the work of one of Britain's finest but almost forgotten comedians.



Safety First: the Rise of Women Lunch Money Movies R1 DVD

This is without a doubt the silliest film I have watched in 2010, but since it features lots of scantily dressed women I can overlook its many major defects.



It purports to be a guide for young women to Occupational Health and Safety matters in high-rise offices. It covers such areas as fire, earthquake and anger management. While narrator Robert Axelrod's voice soon becomes rather grating (he sounds like Mickey Rooney on helium) we are not really listening to him anyway. Even the subtitles use a form of English spelling that I am not familiar with, but who cares? It's the girls we want.

The importance of Staying Calm is stressed. This will often require the removal of tight or constricting clothing like jeans and brassieres. It is good to see a section on surviving earthquakes, where there is a huge amount of shaking and wobbling. I did, however, feel sorry for the gentleman who had a heart attack in the section on Medical Emergencies. He was attended to by the fireman from the Village People and perhaps dying of a stroke would have been the lesser of two evils.

The script is silly, the women can't act, the FX look faked. If you don't believe me watch the film again, this time paying attention to the technical aspects. You may have to watch it a few times to see what I mean. It was a hard film to review, but someone has to do it.



**Alex Cox's Searchers
2.0
BBC Films
Microcinema
R1 DVD**

This wonderful film does for bit-part actors what Zoolander did for male models – lampoons them thoroughly. Nothing is sacred, even the treasured memories of old men of the brief successes in their lives. The film is rude, inconsiderate and politically incorrect. You can't be offended by it, however, because the characters are just that little bit larger than life in their obsession with old movies.

Mel Torres and Fred Fletcher were once child extras in a film, "Inferno at Fort Carson". The film's scriptwriter, Fritz Frobisher, whipped the children to make them scream for the film. The two, now old men, never forgot the whipping and when they hear Frobisher will be opening a rescreening of one of his films at Monument Valley in Arizona they decide to attend and get their revenge. Typical old men, they spend a lot of time talking about it before they actually do anything.

The first problem is their lack of a car. Reluctantly Mel's daughter Delilah agrees to drive them there, not knowing what they have planned. At first the old codgers' constant film reminiscences annoy her but gradually she comes around to enjoying the trip and gently needling them. Her intelligence and sharply defined views about big-name brands are a contrast to the old guys' lazy attitudes. They come to have a bit of respect for each other and their different viewpoints, as should happen in all good road trip films.



When they get to Monument Valley the screening has been cancelled and Frobisher doesn't turn up. Delilah finds out what they intended. After another fight with the old men she takes off to go back home, but a strange coincidence has her discover Frobisher near town.

There is the usual sorting out, explanations and happily-ever-afters but then a tragedy unites them all.

Alex Cox is not known for comedy films, in fact this is first attempt at it. It was also his first feature-length film in nearly twenty years, due to an indiscretion in his early days when he made a film that wasn't acceptable in the politics at the time. Searchers 2.0 was a budget job that cost only \$180,000 but the low cost was more than made up for by the spectacular scenery. If you're going to use outside settings because the budget doesn't allow studio sets, Monument Valley is the place to be. Many early Westerns were made there for just that reason. The name of the film is a take on an early John Ford western made there.

Unfortunately the film hasn't received wide distribution. This is a pity because it deserves to do better. It is a step forward in American comedy, showing some subtlety in its humour that is unusual in an American film. It still has a lot of the corny humour and plot elements that are almost compulsory in these films, but even then Cox seems to be having a subtle dig at the conventions. I liked the final "shootout" where questions and answers about films are used instead of guns and bullets, yet another lampooning of the great gunfight tradition.

Let's hope that Cox is forgiven and allowed to return to the fold, although the digs he takes at film studios may not win him friends. With the U.S. film industry in its current desperate state they are going to need independent films like this and directors like Cox to survive.

"There will come a time when all of us will be dust - nothing, less than zero. You can be absolutely sure that somewhere, in some cave, the radioactive dregs of our descendants will be worshipping a single 35 millimetre frame of "Perseus versus the Space Monsters" .

Web: <http://www.microcinema.com>

Arctic Blast **Anchor Bay** **R4 DVD**

Brian Trenchard-Smith is an Australian cult filmmaker, producer and director who makes large films on miniscule budgets. In the early days he made lots of Aussie genre films and became one of the best representations of Ozploitation. His latest release is an ecothriller called Arctic Blast, set in Tasmania with a strong Australian presence.



Arctic Blast is a real romp; it is return to the early days of B grade disaster films yet with better special effects and an environmental message. I must admit that the plot of this film was a little more interesting than many of a similar ilk.

The earth has weathered many solar eclipses, however, this time global warming has depleted the ozone layer and it cannot protect us from the mesosphere which exists above it. As discussed in the very serious intro to the film, the coldest environment on earth is not the poles, but the mesosphere. 50 Km above the earth temperatures are way below freezing.

When a hole is torn in the ozone layer freezing air is drawn down from the mesosphere to earth creating a deadly blast. This weather change is sever, down to 100 degrees below zero and kills



everything in its path. Moreover it is triggered a series of other holes which make literally take the earth into an ice age.

Physicist Jack Tate (Michael Shanks) has uncovered proof of this disaster after their oceanographic research ship is found frozen with all dead on-board. He must deal with a boss who won't take his grim predictions seriously, a wife filing for divorce claiming he is a workaholic and a difficult daughter.

Of course the story is an old one. Maverick scientist says the earth from destruction, wins back his wife and so on and so on. At the same time Trenchard-Smith has always had a way with B grade films and it has all the elements to make it work. A soap opera, disaster storyline (this time with an environmental twist), lots of CGI with frozen cities, buildings and towns and suspense galore.

This is a cheesy old style disaster film and should be enjoyed for what it is, it clearly doesn't take itself too seriously and it is rather fun to see a film which does not try to be more than it can. Arctic Blast is B grade entertainment and celebrates it.



The A Team 20th Century Fox Blu Ray Region A

The Blu Ray release also includes a digital copy of the film.

The A Team was a 1980's television series known for its larger than life characters and action packed episodes with exaggerated plots. This 2010 adaptation takes the series to even greater heights of insanity with a plot that is truly unbelievable. The DVD includes both the theatrical and extended edition and before the film even begins a long action sequence sets the scene. This is not a film which should be taken seriously, even character is a stereotype and the script is convoluted and rather silly. The special effects are so truly insane you wonder whether you are really seeing what is happening, the plummeting tank comes to mind as well as the exploding cargo liner.

Liam Neeson plays team leader Hannibal Smith with and pro wrestler Quinton Jackson is "B.A." Baracus who is the modern equivalent to Mr.T.



Bradley Cooper is the Face and Sharlto Copley plays the rather unstable pilot Murdock. They are pretty good in their roles and while inspired by the series do not religiously try and mimic the original and hence are credible.

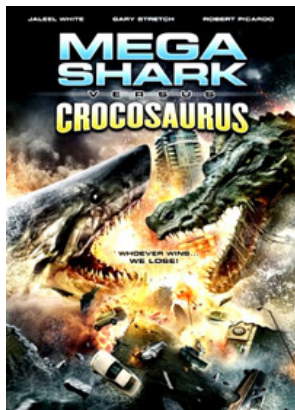
The story begins with a double cross in Bagdad. They are sent in by the CIA to retrieve some stolen U.S Treasury plates when things go awry. Their military commander is supposedly killed in an explosion, the printed cash burnt and the plates stole by Pike, a paramilitary black operative. They are blamed for the loss of the plates and sentenced to ten years in jail. The CIA breaks them out to retrieve the plates but, of course, Lynch, their CIA contact may not be all that he seems. There are twists and turns and a surprise revelation about their supposedly trusted (and supposed dead) military commander.

The action is non stop as is the punching, fighting, smart ass dialogue and scenes which defy the laws of physics. None of the contradictions of the plot or the silliness of much of the action really matters as it is just plain good fun. The extended version comes in over two hours is a bit of a stretch, lagging in parts, but it is worth watching for the truly ludicrous L.A. cargo side finale !



**Mega Shark versus
Crocosaurus
The Asylum
Peacock Films
R4 DVD**

Bigger than Bambi Meets Godzilla ! From the people who brought you the greatest of monster movies, Mega Shark meets Giant Octopus and Mega Piranha, comes the newest monster thriller - Mega Shark Versus Crocosaurus !



From the first I must say that this is a film that didn't need to be made. It is pure schlock, either tongue in cheek or very, very bad. Some bad films are so bad, though, that their defects make them hilarious. This is definitely one such film. It is full of unlikely plots, dodgy science, bad CGI and incredible coincidences.

Basically the plot involves the giant shark from Mega Shark Meets Giant Octopus being alive and well. It is attracted to a U.S. Navy warship where a scientist is experimenting with sound frequencies to repel sharks. It doesn't work, but we see shark fins four stories high, a shark able to destroy gun turrets on a battleship, and a remarkable scene where the shark jumps over the battleship. It's reminiscent of the house-size jumping piranhas in Mega Piranha.

Meanwhile, at an illegal diamond mine in Africa, the miners have disturbed the Crocosaurus, a 1500-foot-long prehistoric survivor. Now that it's awake it wants to feed. A hunter captures it using tranquilliser darts (how much tranquilliser

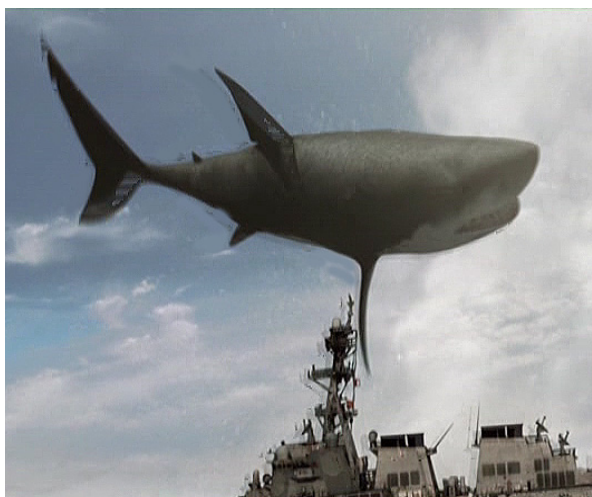


does it take to knock out a quarter-mile-long reptile?) and he ships it off to the U.S. Naturally it escapes and in its search for food it tries to eat the Mega Shark eggs. Protective mummy Mega Shark takes exception to this and the battle is on. The navy, who would have been better off staying right out of it, tries to kill them both with nuclear torpedoes and bombs. Mega Shark eats a sub in retaliation.

"...the shark's just gone nuclear.."

In no time at all they are all off the coast of Hawaii where a convenient volcanic rift in the earth's crust is opened just a few hundred metres offshore, swallowing both animals. We can be sure that they will return.

I knew what to expect from the earlier films in the series and I wasn't disappointed. It is great viewing and will have you rolling in the aisles. It just shows what you can do with enough money and no qualms about schlock.



Straight To Hell Returns Microcinema R1 DVD

In 1986 director Alex Cox made a film called *Straight To Hell*. In a fit of editing enthusiasm they cut many scenes from the original film. Cox has now restored those scenes and reworked others to feature "digitally improved violence and cruelty". Is it an improvement on the cult original?

Cox has always been a fan of the spaghetti western. He wrote a book about these films called *10,000 Ways To Die* that we looked at in *Synergy* Vol. 3 No. 1. In many ways *Straight To Hell* was a homage to these films. There are obvious influences from Sergio Leone's *Fistful of Dollars*. It also has elements of *Last Man Standing* and you can probably pick out many more that affected the final film. I liked the meek hardware store man who talks tough like Clint Eastwood but can't control his promiscuous wife..

Cox says he was also affected by the work of Bunuel, which is a pity. Bunuel's work was usually self-indulgent incoherent rubbish and a little of that incoherence shows in the plot of *Straight To Hell*. The film starts out simply enough. A group of inept bank robbers escape with their loot into the Mexican countryside. Their car breaks down and they bury the loot and take refuge in what appears to be an abandoned town. There are people in the town, though. It is run by the MacMahons, a cruel family whose patriarch seems to be the only rational one in the clan. They make a living by robbing and killing anyone who strays off the highway into their domain.



The Police turn a blind eye to this. The outsiders are regarded with suspicion at first but after they kill two bounty hunters in the main street they are accepted by the townspeople. It is as if they have proven something by being as ruthless as the MacMahons.

The next few days are a mix of lust and irrational killings. The townsfolk are tormented by the MacMahons but seem to make no effort to get away, even though you can see the highway from the village. It's as if they prefer to stay trapped in their own unreal little microcosm and face the MacMahons rather than leave and face the real world.

It can't last, of course. On the fourth day Mr D, the robbers' boss, comes looking for them. He is just as tough as the rest of them and the resulting battle ("shootout" is too mild a term) sees dozens dead, the village on fire and one of the robbers abandoning his friends and escaping with his new girlfriend to recover the loot and make a new start. Possibly.

On the surface the plot seems fairly straightforward but Cox has left so many questions unanswered that viewers must practically build their own plot on the foundation of the film.



Big Tits Zombie
Madman
Entertainment
R4 DVD

Japanese with English Subtitles

This film is also known as *Big Tits Dragon*, *Kyonyu Dragon*, and *Hot Spring Dragon vs Stripper 5*.



Strippers, yes. Dragons, no. It was adapted from a manga cartoon but has more in common with *Zombie Strippers* (reviewed some time ago in Synergy) than with dragons. It is unashamed schlock but it stars some very attractive young ladies.

The plot is negligible, as you would expect from this sort of film. A group of down-on-their-luck strippers are squatting in an old building. In a basement they find an ancient book of spells and one girl tries it out for fun. She inadvertently summons an army of zombies and the slaughter begins.

The story and action are substantially the same as American zombie films. Japanese film often takes a different approach to a subject but in this case it is pretty standard.

The zombies shamble, there are lots of decapitations, chainsaws are found to be useful weapons, you will become a zombie if you are bitten, and so on.

The differences with the American zombie style

films are subtle.

There are no boyfriends in view – the girls are on their own. There are no sex scenes even though the leading actress, the VERY attractive Sola Aoi, is a leading adult entertainment actress. (If you remember she appeared in loads of Pink Eiga titles, very popular with Synergy readers !)

Rather it is a story of survival of a small group of tough, independent girls doing their best in a hostile world. Especially young attractive girls.

The film looks low budget, but that doesn't really matter. Everyone seems to have a lot of fun and so will the viewers. It is just silly enough that you can't take it seriously – moments like when the girls' sushi comes to life and attacks them are enough to lighten the mood and make you realise that this is a film to laugh with, not be terrified by.

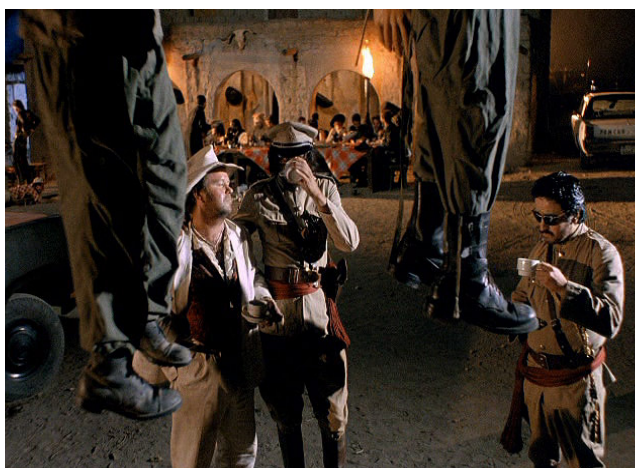




For instance, what do the animated skeletons have to do with it? How does the hot dog man make a living when nobody seems to buy his product? How does all the beer get into town? Why is there a gratuitous wet T-shirt scene? (well, OK, it's probably very artistic and improves the film a lot). Why are the MacMahons obsessed with coffee? These questions may be hallmarks of a good cult film but they can also leave the audience confused about what it was that they have just watched. Or should we not expect a coherent plot but just play "pick the celebrity" instead?

There are a few to choose from – Elvis Costello, The Pogues, Grace Jones and Courtney Love to name some. In most cases celebrities don't improve a film but I must admit in this film they do give some nice little cameos.

Straight To Hell Returns is a decidedly strange film. I am still unsure if it needed to return, but it has a strange fascination that will keep you watching until the end.



Ozploitation Vol 3 Umbrella DVD R4 DVD

The Ozploitation compilations comprise early Australian films dating from the 1970s. The industry was finally becoming better financed and the censorship rules were being relaxed. Many filmmakers were funded by the new Australian Film Commission, who may have received a surprise when they saw what sort of films they were funding.



The films ranged across a number of genres. There was the *Barry Mackenzie* series, each a little more gross than the last. Although some people were insulted, many liked the hard-drinking sex-mad caricature Aussie. This sort of film generally faded away as scripts and production staff got better. Some films like *Australia After Dark* were simply exploitation films designed to appeal to the tits'n'bums market but even these gradually improved in quality. They developed plots and a touch of comedy that made films like *Alvin Purple* popular. Sex was still popular in films like *Felicity* but this was more like beautifully filmed erotica than smutty titillation.

Some films explored other genres than sex and comedy. *Patrick* is a dark chiller of a film. *Mad Dog Morgan* and *Ned Kelly* looked at Australia's colonial history from the bushranger viewpoint and *Eliza Fraser* (1976) was based on a shipwreck on Moreton Island where Eliza was captured by local aborigines.

One thing was common to many Australian films – an overseas actor in the starring role. This "cultural cringe" was a common problem at the time and it took a while for the Australian actors to overcome it. They were helped by the early film of *Ned Kelly* that starred Mick Jagger. His acting was so bad that by contrast the Australians looked like well-trained professionals.

This third compilation has more of the schlock we came to expect from these days, but it also has examples of the better films that were being made. It shows the steady improvement in the industry, with hardly a kangaroo to be seen.



The ABC of Love and Sex 1977
Umbrella Entertainment
Ozploitation Vol 3
R4 DVD Set

Director Paul Lamond was undoubtedly the king of Australian schlock. Although he went on to do quite good mainstream films he first made his reputation with films like this one. Compared with *Australia After Dark* this is a fairly restrained film, with less nudity and more serious content. It is made as a mockumentary training film for sex education, but it's not fooling anyone – it still has enough gratuitous nudity to keep the audience happy.

The format is simple. It goes through the ABC putting a sexual or romantic function to each letter and then “illustrating” it with film clips. This is definitely educational, or something. Some of the clips are quite extended, probably to help the slow learners. I would not recommend the film, though, as a way of teaching kiddies their ABC. It could lead to some embarrassing questions.

For some unknown reason Lamond thought it was necessary to have a pair of rather beefy-



looking dancers introduce each letter. This would have been better if they were nude.

The film is not a great piece of work as it stands but it is historically valuable as it marks a point where the Australian film industry branched out into previously forbidden areas. There's not a kangaroo or koala in sight.'

Australia After Dark 1975
Umbrella Entertainment
Ozploitation Vol 3
R4 DVD Set

The relaxation of censorship laws in Australia did not always lead to more interesting films. Echoing the U.S. experience many producers, especially John Lamond, produced quicky schlock films that simply concentrated on getting as much nudity as possible on celluloid. *Australia After Dark* is definitely one of these.

37 segments purport to show Australian night-life, although most of the film segments happen

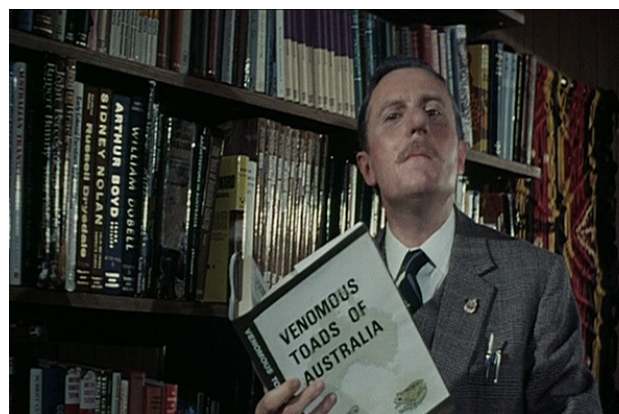




in daylight. We have such culturally enlightening moments as life in a bikini shop, a stripper who may or may not be a male, and as much topless or nude swimming as they can get away with. Occasionally a segment is slipped in that does not feature nude women, such as the Henley-on-Todd regatta at Darwin, held in a dry riverbed. We also have Tully, the "Flying Saucer Capital of Australia". We have the old Pentridge gaol and death masks of people who were hung there. This is probably intended to be educational content. But then it's back to the nudity. The segment of the initiation of a witch "in a forest outside Melbourne" is downright laughable, but even here we get a nude female sacrifice. Probably just as well – Melbourne needed some nightlife.

The whole show comes across as one of those giggly schoolboyish "aren't we naughty" films. The women are pretty much what we saw on the beach every weekend in those days so there was no real shock element in the film.

You couldn't even call it a "film industry coming-of-age" because of its pure schlock content. Still, it's fun to watch to recall those days on the



beach before skin cancer. It is also a reminder that Australia could produce bad exploitation films just like the rest of the world, so it is good to see it included in this collection.

Barry Mackenzie Holds His Own 1974 Umbrella Entertainment Ozploitation Vol 3 R4 DVD Set

This sequel to *The Adventures of Barry Mackenzie* (1974) did not seem much different from the earlier film. The same jokes, the same coarseness and racism, the same Barry Humphries in drag - they are all there once more. As such the film relies on plot to keep it going. Does it succeed?

Barry and his Aunt Edna are on their way back to Australia but Edna is confused for Princess Elizabeth by a pair of Transylvanian agents who kidnap her. I don't know how they could confuse a fat, ageing drag queen for a young, slim princess, but this is one of those films where you put aside your critical faculties and just enjoy the story. Edna must be rescued by Barry (we find his real name is Barrington), his brother who is a priest, and the usual bunch of drunken, brawling, chundering mates.





Along the way we get British jokes, French jokes, women jokes, chundering, and other classy acts of the sort that almost defined the two films. Australians were not really like this (I hope) but sometimes it is fun watching yourself being caricatured. There is a heartwarming scene where British actor John Le Mesurier plays a would-be immigrant who can win Australian citizenship through a game-style quiz show. The questions are predictably along the line of “what country has the best beaches, drive-through bottle shops, marsupials, etc in the world?”. The answers, of course, are “Australia” – all except the trick question at the end “Which country is the arsehole of the world?”. Another nice scene is where the Minister for Kultcha introduces the film as the first English-language films with English subtitles. The audience will need this to follow the accents and many of the jokes.

The supposed Aussie slang is still there and is sometimes quite inventive – I will leave you to work out what “putting the ferret through the hairy hoop” means. The film has some song and dance routines that do nothing for it.

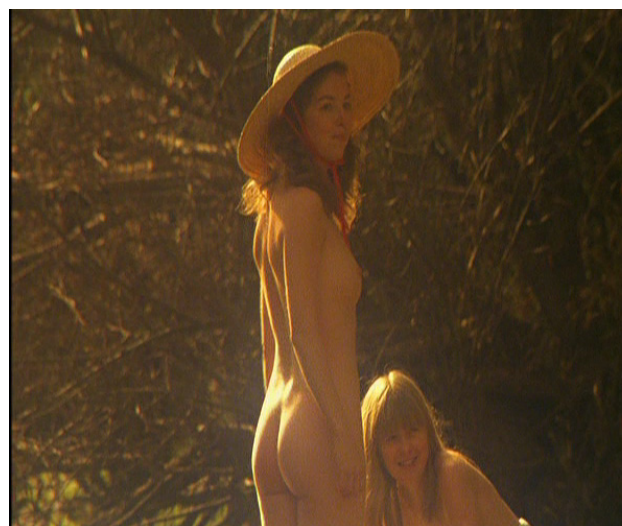


The film, like its predecessor, is pure schlock but it's funny enough to be worth looking at again – if only to ask “why did they make this rubbish?”

Felicity 1979
Umbrella Entertainment
Ozploitation Series 3
R4 DVD

The relaxation of censorship laws in Australia in the 70s spawned a range of more erotic films than the country had seen before. Unlike most U.S. productions, though, the Australian films were made to the same quality guidelines as regular films. There were no “quicky” films to flood the porn market as in the U.S. Perhaps our directors just didn't know how to make a porno? Some films were designed to be a bit of fun, like the Alvin Purple films, most films now included a bit of nudity, but some were quite artistic and tasteful in their filming and construction. Felicity is one of these.

Felicity, played by the lovely Glory Annen, is a Catholic schoolgirl at a girls' college where any





mention of sex is suppressed. Nice girls just don't do that sort of thing. Her only comfort to her hormonal urges is feelie sessions with her best friend and the occasional exhibitionism for the local boys – purely by accident, of course. She is invited to holiday in Hong Kong with her sister and she gives her sexual urges full rein, going at it for all she's worth. Not to put it too politely, she becomes a bit of a slut. Still, true love triumphs in the end.

Apart from the exotic Hong Kong footage the film could just as well have been made in Bendigo, but the Hong Kong shots give it a more cosmopolitan look. If only the director hadn't changed to soft focus every time Felicity gets it on.

There are some nice little touches in the film, such as John-Michael Howson playing a camp womens' clothing salesman (or is he really



camp? Felicity's sister notes that he seems to like his work dressing naked women too much).

By Australian standards the film was pretty raunchy at the time. Even by today's standards it is a rather nice erotic story.

Les Patterson Saves The World 1987

Umbrella

Ozploitation Series 3

R4 DVD

Not all the New Wave Australian films were in the same class as Mad Max or Gallipoli. Les Patterson was so bad it even offended Australians with its crude stereotypes. A large part of the problem was due to Barry Humphries, the producer and lead actor. He and his wife also wrote the film. He had a stage show character, Edna Everage, who was supposed to be a parody of an Australian housewife.

This character did not translate well to film and the whole plot seems to be simply a series of bad taste jokes often promoting Edna Everage. Normally this wouldn't matter to Australians but





the sad truth is that the jokes just weren't very good. Neither was the sight of an ageing cross-dresser trying to be funny with the old jokes that we had already seen in his stage show. Australians were becoming more sophisticated and this crude humour was losing out to the quality comedy shows and films being imported from Britain's BBC.

Humphries also played Les Patterson, a more interesting if disgusting character. His part as the hard drinking, farting, whoring Australian diplomat is more like what you would expect from a pub comedian – simple crude jokes, slapstick and perhaps more importantly the racist attitude that was rampant in Australia at the time.

Lampooning this attitude wasn't really necessary though – attitudes were already changing and so many of the film's rather racist jokes look a bit dated. It is this slight out-of-dateness that stamps the film as schlock rather than true comedy.

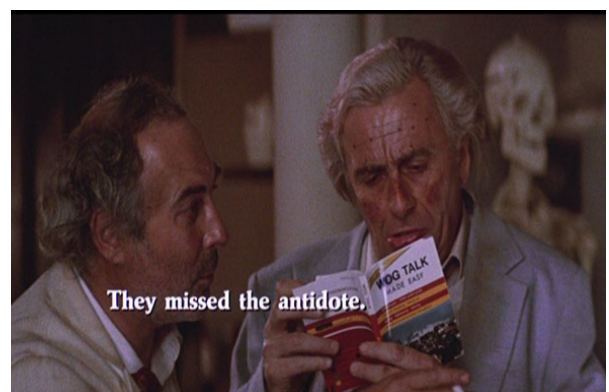
The film does have moments of brilliance to keep it going, though. As an example there is a



scene of "a typical Australian suburb" with the Opera House and Harbour Bridge in the background and a mob of kangaroos in the foreground. This seems to be a dig at the attitudes of tourists who apparently fully expected to see kangaroos hopping down the street. The exploding koala was a nice touch.

There are many well-known Australians in the film. Our industry was young and there wasn't much of a pool of talent to draw on so we tended to see the same actors or actresses in many different films. It was a surprise, though, to see Hugh Keays-Burne, the head of the bike group in *Mad Max*, as Inspector Farouk in this film. He played the part to perfection – frankly, better than Humphries played his own parts. We also see a number of foreign actors and actresses. Australia was not yet confident enough about its films to rely entirely on local talent.

The film is not as good perhaps as *Barry Humphries Holds His Own*, but it is still a bit of fun. .





Mad Dog Morgan 1976
Ozploitation Series 3
Umbrella Entertainment
R4 DVD

Some years earlier we had seen Ned Kelly, starring Mick Jagger. The film was widely regarded as badly acted rubbish. Mick Jagger may have been a good singer but his acting skills were zero. His attempts to turn his strong Liverpool accent into an Australian / Irish one made me cringe. Director Phillippe Mora was taking a great risk of repeating this epic failure but this time Hollywood actor Dennis Hopper was to star. The difference in quality (and accent) is dramatic.

Morgan was a bushranger who terrorised the wealthy squatters along the New South Wales – Victoria border. Like Kelly he was brought up hating the “traps” (the colonial police) and the wealthy. He turned to bushranging, was captured and imprisoned for twelve years, and came out a bitter man. He went back to bush-ranging but with the Police on both sides of the



border hunting him his career was bound to be short. Like Ned Kelly he was ambushed and killed.

The film as usual starred an overseas actor but made up the other parts with Australians. Many went on to become well-known actors in their own right, like Frank Thring, Jack Thompson and David Gulpilil. It was well-made even though the camera and sound staff were as relatively inexperienced as the actors.

For once the extras are better than the usual Director's Commentary. The interview with Hopper is particularly fun to watch as he discusses his attitudes to Australians, his alcohol problems and run-ins with the Victorian Police, and his acting style.

The film shows how much the Australian industry had matured after the schlock of the early 70s. Hopper's character acting is a pleasant change from the rather wooden acting of many of the Australians, particularly later in the film when he is wandering the bush alone and friendless. Mora didn't go overboard on the violence and blood. He concentrated on plot, character and action and Mad Dog Morgan foreshadowed what the Australian industry could do.





Patrick 1978
Ozploitation Series 3
Umbrella Entertainment
R4 DVD

In the early days of Australian cinema there was something of an obsession with naked women, now the censorship rules were relaxed. *Patrick* is a first class horror film that instead relied on a strong plot and brilliant acting.

Robert Thompson plays the title role. As a young boy Patrick killed his mother and her boyfriend by electrocuting them in their bath. He has been committed to a mental hospital ever since, and is catatonic. He is regarded as a human vegetable, but there is something else about Patrick. Deep in his inert body there is a powerful and often malicious intelligence capable of telekinesis – moving objects by the power of thought alone. Nobody suspects this, not even the nurses who must stay with him all the time to keep his eyes from drying out and to take care of his bodily functions.

He is assigned a new nurse, Kathy, (Susan Penhaligon gives a perfect performance) who talks to him as if he is conscious and generally



treats him as a human. She even asks a psychologist friend to check him. Of course this is a breach of professional ethics and the matron, who regards Patrick as a waste of a valuable bed, nurse and resources, is not impressed. Nor is the hospital's Dr Roget (played brilliantly by Robert Helpmann). Any suggestion that he has missed something in Patrick's diagnosis is an insult to his integrity.

When Kathy is doing some typing one night in Patrick's room he manages to make contact with her through the typewriter. At first she thinks the typewriter is playing up but Patrick's typed words soon start to make sense and she realises he is telekinetic. He tries to help her with her personal problems, in his own dangerous way. Her estranged husband is badly burnt. The psychologist friend is trapped in a disused lift.

Matters come to a head when the Doctor and matron decide that Patrick should die in a "power failure" that will stop his life support machinery thus removing the financial problem of keeping him alive. The matron goes to the basement to turn off the power. The Doctor prepares to inject Patrick with a lethal solution. Patrick fights back ruthlessly.

Kathy will have to confront Patrick's dark inner self to save the ones she loves, but can she beat Patrick? Patrick admits he is in love with her, but can he let her go?

The film is dark and touches on areas of parapsychology that the medical fraternity would probably ignore. Thompson's dark, brooding eyes give him a tremendous sense of menace for someone who just lies there and doesn't speak a word during the film. This is undoubtedly the best horror film to come out of Australia.

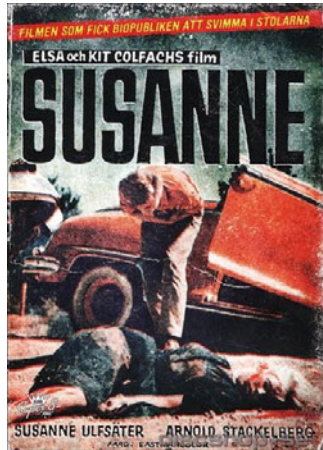


**Susanne
Sweden
Klubb Super 8**

Swedish with English subtitles

If you expect that because this film is Swedish it will have lots of nude women, you're going to be disappointed. It is more of a morality tale on the evils of defying your parents (who know what's best). It shows what will become of you if you indulge in dreadful vices like smoking, dancing and listening to jazz music. If we are to believe the film you will finish up degraded, abandoned by almost everyone you knew, and pregnant. In many ways the morality issues are hammered so hard that it turns the film into a farcical comedy. It was made in 1960 and attitudes have certainly changed since then.

Susanne is a normal rather boring young teenager whose life is ruled strictly by her socialite parents. They rarely spend time with her but wish that she was a little warmer and would smile a bit. With selfish parents like that I can understand why she doesn't. She has friends who seem to have a normal life and (shock ! horror !) boyfriends. So one day when her parents are off socialising again she goes into town to meet "the gang".



A young mechanic called Olle is attracted to her, and she to him. At one meeting they go for a drive (very fast) and have a serious car crash. Olle is injured, Susanne is thrown from the car and is near death. She recovers but her personality has changed. She is now rude, slutty and disobedient. She still has one friend, Bibbi, but when she rejoins the gang even Olle is put off by her new personality. Inevitably she discovers sex and just as inevitably she becomes pregnant, as you do if you are unmarried. There is a lovely scene where her new boyfriend takes her for a motorbike ride along the railway tracks, apparently in the hope of aborting the baby. An oncoming train would have done a better job.

Her parents have disowned her for bringing disgrace on them but Susanne doesn't really care. Olle sticks by her and marries her but it is hard work bringing up a baby and looking after a wife who still feels something is missing from her life.

Then something happens that makes her re-evaluate her life so they can all live happily ever after.

It sounds corny and terribly earnest and it is, but what would you expect from a film made by a doctor? It is still, however, an interesting film to watch. It's naïve simplicity lifts it above the U.S. morality films of the same period and makes it a little more believable, or at least more entertaining. There is none of the sexploitation that marked so many U.S. films of this kind – not even a flash of nipple. It's just a simple warning film to Swedish youth, not particularly well made, that is a bit of fun.



Yatterman
Bonzai Media
Corp
Eastern Eye /
Madman
R4

Yatterman is an eccentric fantasy film from Japanese film legend Takashi Miike, it is based on the Anime series from Tatsuo Yoshida but is presented as a live action rather than Anime film. It is a truly bizarre experience which crosses all sorts of genre boundaries. The question which came to mind as I watched it was what sort of audience is this aimed at? On one level it is a kid's film, but much like *The Great Yokai War* by Miike, he has placed enough adult elements to make it a great watch for adults as well. Doronjo, the evil femme fatale looks like a bondage queen, her offsider Boyacky dreams of having all the schoolgirls in Japan piled into one mountain and one of their "Mecha" weapons is a gigantic robotic woman who shoots war heads out of her breasts while screaming "I'm coming" and is only destroying when Mecha ants bite her nipples off; not the sort of thing you would see in more staid Aus-



tralian or United States children's films.

The original anime series Yatterman ran from 1977 to 1979. The series had some one hundred eight episodes and was one of Japan's most popular series. In 2008, thirty years after the original, the series was revived and in 2009 Takashi Miike made this feature to celebrate the film. Miike, however, is known for his dark, if not perverse, sense of humour and hence Miike takes the Yatterman series and subverts it including all sorts of strange subplots, adult imagery and a truly wicked sense of humour.

It is quite a visually overpowering film with astounding special effects, a superfast paced storyline and very quirky and unusual cinematography. There are factoids explaining various scenes in the films, giant robots (Mechas), an Indiana Jones like story, superheroes and lots of lots of strangeness.

Gan, the son of the owner of Takada Toy Shop, and his girlfriend, Ai are inseparable and form the nexus of the Yatterman superhero team. Together they have created a huge Mecha, Yatterwoof, a dog-shaped robot and a range of smaller robots with which they battle evil. Their adversary is Doronjo, the leatherclad femme fatale who leads the Doronbow gang with robot maker Boyacky and henchman Tonzra.

The gangs are brought together in conflict when Skullobey tricks the Doronjo team into searching for the four pieces of the Skull Stone, which when combined become a mystic device to control time. Yatterman are joined by the daughter of an archaeologist who has been seeking to protect the stone pieces.

As battle mounts against battle, the Mechas get bigger, the stakes get larger and the total insanity of the Yatterman film becomes a truly unique cinematic experience.



**American Nudie
Classics
Alternative
Cinema
R1
M**

It is good to see these older films being salvaged and restored (as far as possible) so we can see what the current attitudes in erotic film have developed from. With the pro-censorship wowsers increasingly trying to control what we watch we should be able to turn back the clock and see just how bad (or otherwise) the current erotica really is. This compilation offers forty one films from the 1930s to the 1960s. The size of the compilation lets us compare trends and social attitudes over the forty-year period.

The films of the 1930s are surprisingly frank. In the guise of naturism, a political and social movement that promoted nudity in private or in some social occasions, films were able to depict nudity. Not just a flash of breast but full frontal nudity. The actresses in these films seemed happy and natural although some of the situations they faced were a bit contrived. Most of the films are short peep show types but there is one, "Nautical Nudes", that runs for nine minutes – a massive epic that featured that rarity in erotica, a plot. There is also a "tableau" scene. These allowed semi naked women to pose "artistically" in a classic style.

During the 1940s people had other things on their mind, like World War II. The erotica of this period is mainly loops of on-stage costume acts



of minimum titillation value. With a ready market to the war weary troops on R&R there was little demand for anything more elaborate. The development of colour film from Kodak and Agfa allowed some of the later clips to be made in colour, and even for sound to be added.

In the 1950s the "one-reeler" became popular. These were short films (around five minutes, the capacity of a reel of 8mm film) and most of those in the collection came from the coin machines of arcades once again. Mostly they featured young ladies rolling around on a bed or just standing there sort of wobbling enticingly. The ladies were unaccompanied – the population wasn't ready for that sort of goings-on just yet. Unlike the films of the 1930s full frontal was uncommon. Were viewers becoming more prudish? The models were certainly wearing more, but not much more. In most of these films the panties stayed on. The first black actresses started to appear on the films, and that strange fetish, the suspender belt and stockings, began to make them look like the victims of a failed bondage experiment.

By the 1960s all the films were in colour. They still had a short one-reeler format since videotape was just coming onto the market in the professional areas. Some of their content was unashamedly pornographic – for the day. Sometimes the girls appeared (gasp !) without panties.

It is hard to see these films as pornographic. Most are quite tame, some are just silly. There is no arguing that they were intended to be the pornography of their day but as attitudes and preferences changed so did the content of the films. Now they are just fascinating aspects of the history of film.

**Around The World
With Fanny Hill (aka
Jorden Runt Med
Fanny Hill)
Erotica
Sweden
Klubb Super 8
R2 DVD**

M

This film was made in 1973 but has cleaned up really well for its age. It was produced to exploit the increasing desire for light erotica in the world film industry caused by the growth in video recorders. It also got around many of the anti-pornography laws in the U.S. because of its foreign origin.

The plot is largely unimportant. Fanny suspects her husband is having it off with some of the models he works with daily. He is confident that she is faithful to him although she actually is getting a bit on the side. She arranges to set him up with her best friend Monica to test his loyalty. Although he resists at first he finally gives in to her. At that point Fanny bursts in with a photographer. She now has evidence to divorce him.

She and Monica then set off to build film careers in Hollywood. There is lots of nudity, a certain amount of slapstick humour, and more nudity. Since both girls are quite attractive I managed to sit through the nude scenes (several times) to bring you this review. Someone's got to do it. The sex scenes are titillating but in no way offensive. Admittedly, I am not easily upset by nudity but I find it hard to imagine how this film could be regarded as pornographic by anyone.



From Hollywood the girls go to Hong Kong .for no apparent reason. Here they meet up with the film producer from Hollywood again and more nudity ensues.

Fanny's husband Roger has found out where she is and wants her back so he follows her around the world. Next stop Venice, then Munich where we see the evils of the permissive rock culture. And more nudity. And so on. But even with a film career and fame she finds she still loves Roger.

As films go this is a real lightweight, but it's not intended to be anything else. It's just a sexy little romp with attractive women. What more could you want?

**Baksmälla (aka (lit.)
Hangover, Tender-
ness, Danish Love,
Krapula, Memories of
Love, Sex Life in
Denmark)
Sweden
Klubb Super 8**

M

*Swedish with English
subtitles*



Ignore the "Sex Life in Denmark" nonsense. That's just advertising hype to get more viewers to watch what is really a good drama about love and its effects on the personalities and relationships involved. Sure, there is a bit of nudity (well, quite a bit) but those who expect to see another Swedish light porno film will be disap-



pointed. That's about the only disappointing thing about the film, though.

The film starts with Leif, a confirmed bachelor divorcee, waking up in bed with a foot beside his head and a wedding ring on his finger. At the other end of the foot is his long-term girlfriend, Lena. They appear to have got married yesterday. Lena is also surprised – she also had no intention of marrying again after divorcing a lazy, oafish husband. She is still lost in fond memories of a holiday in Spain where she could give her sexual needs full expression with no ties. Now she is worrying that she is aging and that marriage may destroy her looks. Through a series of slightly confusing and disjointed flashbacks we see how this situation came about.

Leif saw Lena at a coffee shop one day and haunted the shop in the hope of meeting her. When they finally met they hit it off and soon became bed partners. One morning Lena was surprised to find Leif's other girlfriend, or possibly his ex-wife, walking naked around his house.



Instead of a catfight, though, the two girls seemed to hit it off in spite of Leif's promiscuity.

From there the affair developed to the current marriage situation. Leif has reined in his sexual exploits with other girls and curtailed his alcoholic habit. Lena has told him intimate secrets of her past. Little by little the two have drawn together but both still profess to want to remain single. Now that a drunken night's spur-of-the-moment decision has led them to marry, can their relationship survive? Or will they divorce again so they can keep their single but rather lonely status?

For its age the film is remarkably good. The questions raised are just as relevant today and the attitudes of the characters are still realistic. The acting is superb, and even filtered through some sloppy subtitling the dialogue is intelligent and natural.

Writer / director / lead actor Jorn Donner has produced a really good human drama film. Diana Kjaer, apart from being absolutely gorgeous, plays her part with just the right hesitancy of a person who doesn't want to get too deeply into a relationship.

The Klubb Super 8 transfer to DVD is good quality with only a few minor colour glitches and



jumps to show how old the master film or videotape is. It should help to dispel the myth that the Swedes only made porno films.

Now, about all those names. Apart from trying to get more bums on seats in theatres many countries appear to have had the film recut to suit their viewers' tastes. Generally it was a matter of adding more nude shots. The DVD includes one of the "spiced up" versions with more nudity and less plot for those countries that preferred their films to be more titillating. Frankly I prefer the Swedish version.

Bel Ami
Vintage Erotica
Klubb Super 8 Video
R2 DVD

M

English with Swedish subtitles

This 1976 film sits midway between the early European erotica with its humour and reasonably intelligent plots and the American demands for more graphic sex. In 1972 *Deep Throat* was released in the U.S. and its success meant that the Scandinavian filmmakers had to follow its lead or drop out of the market.

Bel Ami director Mac Ahlberg imported a rising U.S. porn actor, Harry Reems, and used the usual bevy of local beauties. In spite of the thinner plot and Mr Reems' improbable moustache Ahlberg turned out quite a nice piece of erotica. He did not forget to include a bit of comedy and



the camerawork is superb. As a result this film still has the style and class of traditional Euro erotica. Style and class were something the later U.S. directors sadly lacked. Plot was more important to Ahlberg than penetration and the "money shot".

As far as the plot goes, bumbling reporter George (Reems) is instructed by his editor at New Morality magazine to do a piece on decaying moral standards in art. He visits an exhibition run by rival magazine Playhouse and is



“taken care of” by the girls. For some reason that is not obvious he is irresistible to women and they drop everything at the sight of him. There is a lot of “dropping everything” and many rather mild but tasteful sex scenes. Sleeping your way to the top was never so much fun..

For an old show the transfer to DVD is quite good. The sound is a little patchy, but the girls are simply astounding. Despite its age, *Bel Ami* is worth a look.

Nana
Klubb Super 8
R2 DVD
M

English with Swedish subtitles

I have mixed emotions about this film. One the negative side it has minimal plot and minimal characterization but on the positive side it is beautifully filmed and stars Anna Gael, a very attractive lady. The biggest problem is that is based on Emile Zola's novel *Nana* about the sex life of a French courtesan. It must have been an exceptionally boring novel because, even when converted to film, it is still boring.

It deals with *Nana*'s promiscuous behaviour, swapping boyfriends rich or poor, and staying in borrowed apartments where her parties soon turn into orgies. She is something of a female predator taking and discarding men as she pleases. She has trouble handling rejection, however, and her life will become more difficult. The problem is that the audience soon becomes bored with Miss Gael's body, whether partly clad or fully nude, but there is little else to keep the film going. When the film first showed in



Sweden much of the audience walked out. The rest was probably asleep. A later version cut by ten minutes and renamed *Take Me, Love Me* suffered similar obscurity.

There is a rumour that even the body was not Anna Gael's – a body double was used. There is a counter-rumour that they took the shots of her body anyway and left them in the film.

The film is in its own way quite tastefully erotic. It never goes into pornography and perhaps this was what gave it a poor reception. At a time when standards were becoming more liberal this film just wasn't what the audiences expected. It was still hot enough to get an X rating in the United States, though. Nowadays the erotic content wouldn't rate a mention.

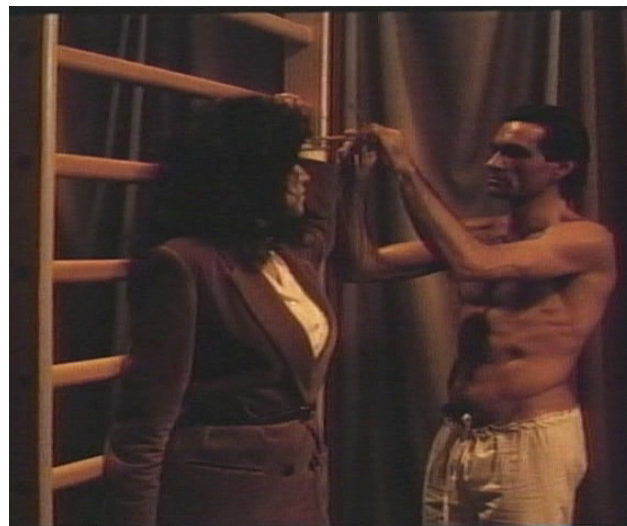
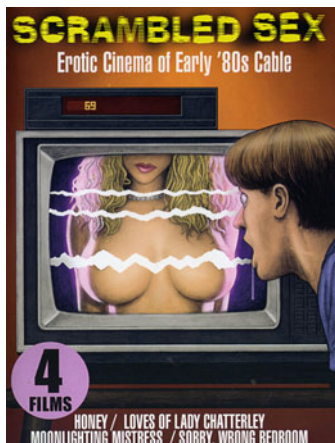


Scrambled Sex Erotic Cinema of Early 80s Cable Secret Key Motion Pictures All Region DVD

After the one-reeler mildly pornographic films of the 50s, 60s and 70s two new media emerged to cater for these special interests. One was videotape and the other was Cable TV. The cable stations were a bigger market so a small industry sprang up to cater for them. Most of the films (and the four examples in this collection) were imported from Italy or Germany and over-dubbed in the U.S.

In the comprehensive sleeve notes Ed Grant, now a film critic but once an importer of the films, describes the market they were catering for and the type of film the cable stations preferred. Even then it was regarded as soft-core – hard-core was definitely out. Cable met the needs of those for whom getting to a theatre that showed these films was too difficult. Often it was on a pay-per-view basis. Grant also describes how, in an effort to protect their product against “accidental” viewing by young children, the Cable signal was often scrambled and could only be decoded with a settop box. So what of the films themselves? Let’s look at the ones in this two-DVD compilation.

Honey stars the attractive Clio Goldsmith in a probably Italian story of a frustrated young girl scriptwriter who forces a producer to read her autobiographical script. In flashbacks she re-



lives those early days as a naïve young girl in the big city.

Loves of Lady Chatterley is an Italian film about a lonely and celibate young woman who lives with her crippled husband in a villa. Her sexual frustration is resolved when a new gardener arrives.

Sorry, Wrong Bedroom is a sex comedy of the kind that the Germans did so well. A bad tempered and ill mannered nightclub manager is driving his staff away with his constant insults. His wife, who has aspirations of becoming a stripper herself, is sent to East Friesland to line up new talent. Her jealous husband follows her but gets his comeuppance while she gets the men.

Moonlighting Mistress is more of a detective story. A husband plots the death of his rich wife so he can get hold of her fortune and keep up his debauched lifestyle. Everything goes wrong and his girlfriend dies. There is another shock





waiting for him as well. This film doesn't have much nudity but has a good story with enough titillation to keep your interest.

None of the films is great cinema but each is a good example of its genre. Individually they are entertaining and mildly sexy. They are good examples of Euro-Erotica and have been overdubbed quite well into English, although the picture quality is not great – they are probably taken from early videotape. They are quite entertaining as well as historical.

**Sleazy 70's Stags
Vintage Erotica
After Hours
Cinema
All Region DVD**

This collection of 24 8-millimetre colour "loops" from the 70s shows the changing styles of fetish as people became more used to them. The emphasis in this collection is on ladies with large busts, an early intimation of a fetish that still carries on today. Unlike today's actresses the ones shown in the loops are entirely natural. There is none of the silicone, collagen and Botox that is required today to fit the "porn star" caricature image.

It must be said that some of the ladies are built in proportion to their mammaries and could do with losing a few pounds. Some are also on the wrong side of forty but I guess the old codgers are entitled to the fantasy of their choice re-



gardless of today's preferences. It now looks a little quaint. We see a number of fetishes creeping in – high heeled shoes in bed, suspender belts and stockings, and (gasp!) crotch-less panties. There is even a threesome. Oh, the depravity ! For the first time in the mass-produced loops simulated sex was on the menu and black actresses were becoming more common.

The plots are pretty much the same as the earlier loops – get your gear off then roll around on the bed. You can fondle your breasts but fingering anything else was still mostly taboo. Even a flash of pubic hair was still rather daring.

The quality is about what you would expect in a transfer from Super 8 film – soft focus, no sound, and abbreviated scenes due to the one-reel limitation. It's surprising how much they could fit onto a roll of film.

These loops continued in production until the release of inexpensive videorecorders made longer and better produced films possible. Without collections like this one these vintage clips would be lost..



Carter Stevens' Teenage Twins Grindhouse Collection
After Hours Cinema
All Region DVD
M



Carter Stevens' films mark the period of change from the early mildly erotic one-reelers to the full-on porno feature films of the late 1970s and early 1980, and before the genre degenerated to the artificial formula porn of the last ten years or so. Penetration shots and girl-on-girl became acceptable, if not compulsory. The three films in this collection have been quite well restored. They come with an informative insert, something missing in a lot of retro collections.

In the Extras there is an interview with Stevens (actually his name is Malcolm Worob) that reveals a lot about the industry at the time. He asked would-be starlets two questions – “do you have any special sexual talents we can use? Do you have any non-sexual talents we can use?”

When a young girl named Brooke Taylor approached him about work he asked the standard questions and was astounded to find she also had a twin sister. In his constant search for something new for his films, this was the Holy Grail. “I got on the phone and called my distributor and said “Quick ! Send me money ! He said “Are you crazy? You just finished shooting. You haven’t delivered the new picture yet.” I said “I’ve got twins”. He said “How much do you need?”

The twins were naïve about sex and he had to have them tutored by another actress. Stevens admits Teenage Twins was not his best film but it was certainly the most popular. Since it includes promiscuity, incest, adultery, anal sex (“I want to stay a virgin until my wedding night”), threesomes and a bit of black magic it would be a hard film to get through the censors now. “Family Values” would see to that. As Stevens points out, though, “It was the seventies...sex was clean and the air was dirty”.

Another girl answered the question about “other talents” by saying she could roller skate. The idea of sex on skates appealed to Stevens and so Rollerbabies was born. The first problem was getting enough actors and actresses to fill the roles. He said he accosted every likely girl in the street and asked “Can you fuck? Can you suck? Can you skate?”

Let’s be honest – it wasn’t much of a film, but it made money and kept him going. Perhaps the high spot of the film is the ice cream blow job scene, perhaps better imagined than experienced, but the pregnant android is another nice touch..

For a while Stevens shared an apartment with a punk rock fan girl. The idea of a film set around a punk band was a different one, so he made Punk Rock. At the time of filming he picked a band called the Stilettos whose lead singer was a girl named Debra Harry. She went on to become a major singer just before the film was finished so he had to use the new lead singer instead. He says she was not as good-looking as Debbie Harry.

The film also starred Wade Nicholls, who was unashamedly gay. Stevens called him “straight for pay”. He did many straight porn films for Stevens but never made a gay film.

Carter Stevens films were very different from the one-reeler porn that preceded it. His girls were attractive, slim and realistic looking. Generally his films were made before the fetish films featuring unnaturally enhanced women, high heels and huge boobs so the girls have a natural look. Some could even be regarded as skinny. It was only a few more years before the porn feature film really took off. He believed in the importance of a plot of sorts and he wasn’t afraid to use light comedy in his early films. Deep Throat had already been released and many producers were looking for that something different – Stevens was not the first producer to look for a new, different idea.

Carter Stevens is a man who obviously enjoyed his work. With the poor standard of current porn genre films perhaps it’s time to give him lots of money and get him back to work.

Dead & Gone
Horror / Suspense
Reel DVD
R4 DVD

First-time director Yossi Sasson has taken a story by the horror story writer Harry Shannon and turned it into quite a passable film. Now, if you are expecting a cheap buckets-of-blood film, this is not it. Cheap, certainly – the budget was reputedly around \$500,000. There is blood but not in the quantities you would expect. Instead the film concentrates on the boundaries between sanity, hallucination and the supernatural.

Jack Wade is the toy boy of Frankie, a Hollywood executive who has slipped into a coma following her unsuccessful cosmetic surgery. Now Frankie's insurance has run out, her remaining money is tied up by relatives who don't want to see the toy boy get his hands on it, and Jack is nearly destitute. All he has to his name is an old shack up in the hills. He won it in a poker game and is unaware that it has a history. Forty years ago a man slaughtered his wife and family then shot himself in a strange moment of madness. Jack "kidnaps" Frankie, life support system and all, and takes her up to the shack.

Jack is not the altruistic guy he seems to be. He has been having an affair with a lawyer who is trying to get Frankie's money for him. Jack's probable intention is to turn off her life support and then he will have some legal claim on the estate.

At the cabin he uses the last of his money to



pay the transporter and the nurse who accompanied him. He has to make up the nurse's payment with a cheque, knowing it will bounce. He also meets the local redneck, Booger, whom he dislikes, and a female deputy sheriff that he would like to crack on to.

Before he can do much there are other things that concern him. His wife's ghost? spirit? taunts him about his lawyer girlfriend. Or is it all developing in Jack's mind? When the nurse returns with the bounced cheque he kills her and her ghost also starts to haunt Jack. Then a televangelist, Reverend Grass, seems to be taunting him too. It seems they are all urging Jack to kill Frankie. Jack is on the verge of madness. When he finds Booger looking through his window one day he kills Booger as well, then his brother who comes seeking revenge. The bodies are piling up and still Jack is being taunted by their ghosts. In an effort to stop Frankie's cruel teasing he turns off her life support. Then the deputy returns with a warrant for his arrest for kidnapping Frankie. The ghosts urge him to kill her as well. Is the history of the cabin sending him insane? Or are his ghosts real?

Quentin Jones as Jack has to carry most of the story himself, mostly because the other characters make brief appearances then die. Although he is a competent actor he is somewhat let down by the plot, which isn't really original, and the direction which could be tighter. Fans of blood and gore will be disappointed. Sasson has concentrated on the plot rather than the special effects and explored the development of the onset of madness. It is not really a horror story as such – the ghosts would need much more development – but it fits the suspense-with-a-bit-of-horror category well. I enjoyed it.



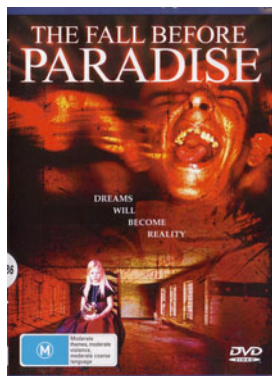
**The Fall Before
Paradise
Reissued by
Flashback
Entertainment
R4 DVD**

This well made independent film is an example of what can be done with good acting, good direction and a good plot. There is a slight air of unreality about it that adds to the plot.

The film opens with a small family group. When the mother wants to go out her 6 year old daughter is terrified to be left with the de facto father, a drunken redneck. When the mother leaves he begins molesting the little girl. Her older brother gets a gun and goes to shoot the molester, but he is very young and is not game to pull the trigger. The father murders him and takes off with the girl.

Some time later a psychiatric patient, Nate, is having strange dreams. He is seeing a little girl's abduction through the eyes of a little boy. This is where the air of unreality creeps in. When Nate goes off his drugs the dreams become stronger. He feels he may be seeing something that has really happened, and the little boy is talking to him in his dreams and asking for his sister to be rescued. Nate has to escape from the institution first. He is helped by Mattie, a girl obsessed with the idea that the phone company is turning people into "drones" by frequencies they send out over phone or internet calls. She wants to blow up the phone company. Unlike Nate she is a self-admitted patient and can leave when she wants to.

She helps Nate to escape and they go to look at the local telephone exchange so Mattie can plan her attack. Here Nate has a revelation – the tool belt that the abductor is wearing in his dreams is the belt worn by telephone repairers. One man comes from the exchange and Nate recognises him as the abductor. The abductor's truck has the same numberplates he has seen in his dream. With so much of his dreams being substantiated he knows the little kidnapped girl must be out there, so they follow the abductor's truck. They track him to his home where he has settled with a new "mother" for the little girl. Her



fear when her new mother goes out to get some groceries drives Nate and Mattie to rescue her but can two wanted mental patients overcome a vicious child-molesting redneck?

Although the film relies heavily on mental illnesses to provide moments of humour in Nate's otherwise institutionalised existence, it is essential to the film. We can understand the effects such strange dreams must have on a sensitive and drugged-up young man, his mental problems and his desire to do something. The institution cannot help him, seeing his dreams as another part of his instability. Nate has to control his dreams, face the world without the support of drugs, control Mattie's desire for demolition, and all the time try to work out where the little girl is or even if she really exists. The film evokes tremendous sympathy for Nate and even for Mattie, who is well-meaning in spite of her own mental imbalance. The mental health issues are generally fairly treated, striking that fine balance between too much ridicule of the ill and enough to make Nate's dreams seem credible (at least, in his own mind).

Steve Gillilan has given us a fine film and Flashback's budget rerelease gives us a chance to see just how good it really is.



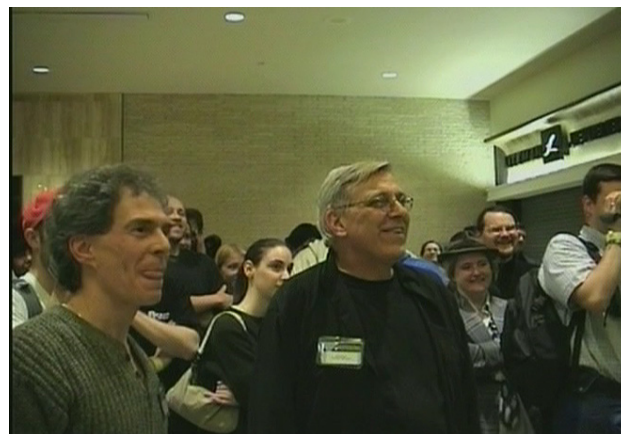
Fan of the Dead Documentary Cheezy Flicks R1 DVD

This is one of the strangest documentaries I have seen in a long while. Nicolas Garreau is a Frenchman with an incredibly bad haircut and an obsession with three

George Romero films, *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), and *Day of the Dead* (1985). He has finally realised his dream of travelling to the city where most of the films were made. The trip obviously made an impression on him, since every second sentence ends with Incredible !

We see the incredible cellar where the people hid from zombies and the incredible lamppost that they drove past on their escape. Garreau and his friends attend a Comic Convention where they meet like-minded obsessives and members of the casts. Then they get a guided tour of other shooting sites as well as a supermarket where some footage was shot. A tour of a shopping mall? Wow ! It's all quite incredible.

One thing that surprised me was his encyclopaedic knowledge of the films and their individual scenes. Nicolas is a man with too much time on his hands, but other fans on the tours seem to be just as bad. Even some of the cast seem to have caught the disease. We meet the man who is The World's Best-Known Zombie. He is proud of being on the cover of a Japanese publication, *Directory of the Undead*. We also meet a number of other zombie actors who seem to remember their parts with enthusiasm

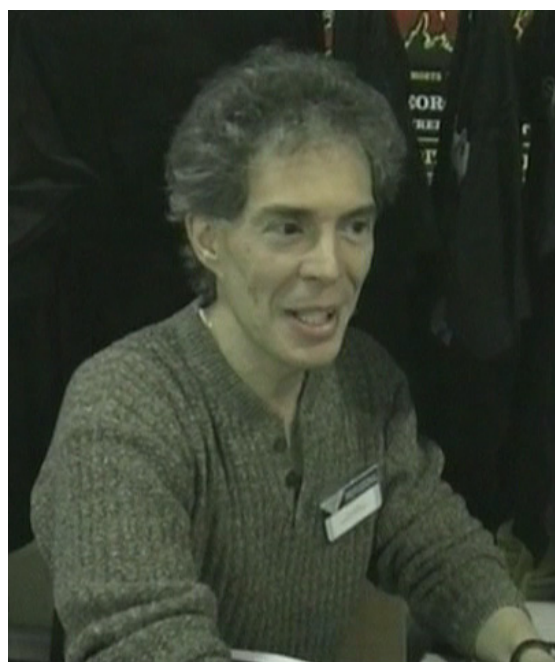


and affection.

Nicolas next embarks on a road trip to find other scenes and buildings used in the films. His ultimate goal is the cemetery from where the zombies came. It is almost a religious moment when he finds the cemetery and is able to retrace the action in the film.

This is true cult movie stuff. Initially I had a good time laughing at their obsession but after a while it became more of a homage to three trend-setting films. These people really know what they are talking about and their enthusiasm communicates itself to the viewer. A lot of people took part in the films and they seem rather proud of their parts, small though they may have been.

It's all quite incredible.

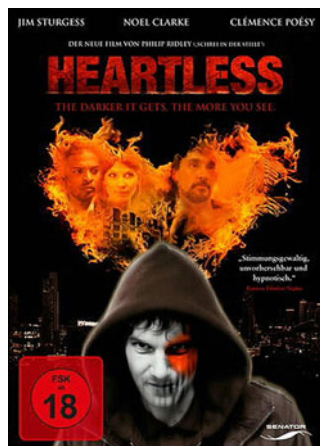


Heartless Sony Pictures R4 DVD

Now that the entire U.S. film industry seems to be in a state of withdrawal there is a chance for smaller firms and independents to move into the gaps. The British seem to be making a push into horror but with their own style – original, thoughtful plots, a lack of the stereotype characters of the U.S. films, and a high level of skill in the production. *Heartless* is one of these.

Jamie, a troubled young man, lives in London's East End which is one of the most violent parts of London. The problem that has haunted him through his life is a large heart-shaped birthmark around his left eye. He wears a hooded jacket to keep his face in shadow when he goes out on the street and is only comfortable with his understanding family.

Currently the East End is being terrorised by a group of youths in hoodies and demon masks who firebomb innocent people. Jamie has seen one of them closeup and knows that the demon face is that of a real demon, not a mask. One night he and his mother become victims of a firebomb attack and she dies. Looking for vengeance, he is directed to Papa B who appears to be Satan (or at least an embodiment of Satan) who offers him a deal. He can have whatever he most wants in exchange for performing an act of graffiti and therefore adding his little bit of Chaos to the world. Jamie agrees. His birthmark that has held him back for so long is gone and his self-confidence is high. He even

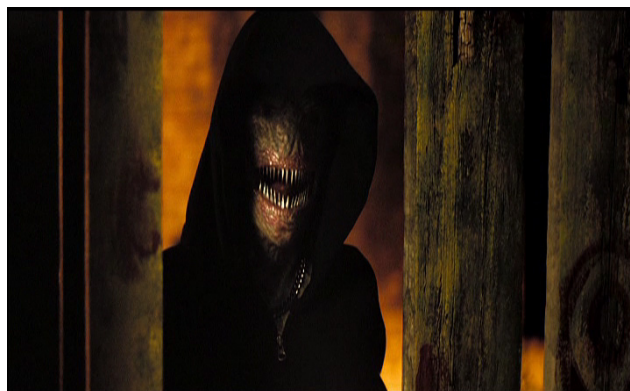
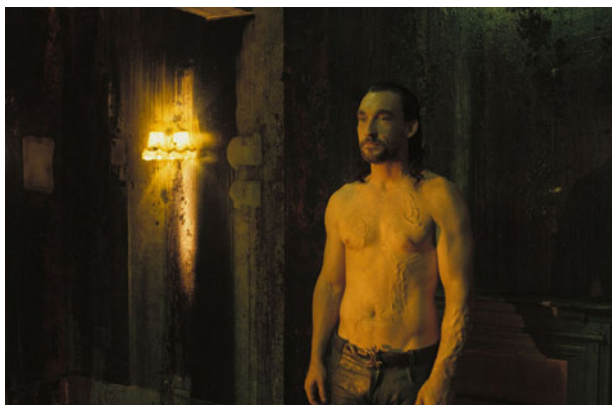


meets a girl and they fall in love.

Before the feeling wanes he is visited by Satan's offside, the Weapons Master. He tells Jamie that the deal has now been changed. No deal with the Devil is ever straight – he is the ultimate deceiver. Jamie won't agree but after a demonstration of Satan's power leaves him bruised and injured he realises he has no choice. He is required to kill a man and place the fresh heart on the steps of a church by midnight – tonight. He has no choice and goes through with the murder, but if he is ever to be free he must have a showdown with Satan.

The film is mostly filmed at night, but skilled cinematography gives us a clear look at what is going on – unlike the U.S. approach of having everything dark and murky in the name of "atmosphere". Director Philip Ridley does not overemphasise the horror with screaming women and chainsaws. Rather he lets a subtle feeling of menace do the work as it closes in on Jamie. The only relief is when Jamie manages to kill some of the demons. Even when you think he has finally triumphed there is a last twist to the story.

This is a top quality film from a rising director. Its originality gives it a fresh look and the treatment of the horror aspects is refreshing. I recommend it.



Let Me In Icon Films R4 DVD

Let The Right One In is a film which created a cult film sensation. Made in Sweden it was a unusual and controversial coming of age love story mixed with an outsider sensibility and one of the strangest vampire films you will ever see. Directed by Tomas Alfredson it was a huge success. When it as discussed that Matt Reeves was going to remake the film for the American market fans were horrified and rightly so, remakes are not normally anything to write home about. *Let Me In* is the American version of the film.

Amazingly Reeves has done justice to the original film as well as giving it some extra elements which add to its poignancy. By setting the film in Reagan period America Reeves is able to explore the themes of bullying and cultural narrowness in a way the original didn't, even if it is only by the eighties soundtrack, social references and the familial context of the film. Owens mother is an alcoholic, his father is non-existent and he lives in a world where he is bullied and mistreated. He has no family or friends to support him and is essentially alone in the world.

A strange girl named Abby moves in next door and they become friends. At the same time brutal murders start to occur in the neighbourhood as bodies are found drained of blood. The juxtaposition of the innocence and intensity of their simple relationship and the brutality of her exist-



ence is superbly played.

We come to understand that Abby's "father" was actually another companion who grew old with her but when he realizes he could no longer collect the blood she needs, lets himself be captures so Owen can take his place. The emotional sensitivities of the relationship between Owen and Abby is beautifully portrayed and the slow progression in Owen's psychological development until he is willing to accept Abby for what she is well handled. Abby becomes his solace from a cruel and vicious world and ultimately it is assumed he will become her guardian.

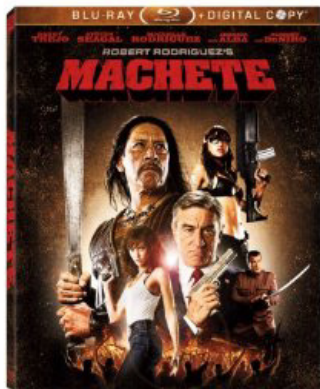
This is a melancholic film filled with bleakness, loneliness and compassion and is one hell of a vampire tale. The bullying scenes are uncomfortable and so realistic you cringe and want to look away. With the current youth suicides across America due to bullying there is a relevance to plot.

Reeves has remade Let Me In close to the original keeping an eye on the plot but modifying the CGI for excellent effect while giving the film a very bleak 1980's American tone. This is one of the best horror remakes I have seen in quite a while. It has taken a haunting and compelling film and moved it to America without the loss of context, character development or plot, no mean feat !



Machete
20th Century Fox
Blu Ray Region A
and Digital Copy

Robert Rodriguez of Sin City and Grindhouse is well known for his love of genre and B grade cinema and Machete is the ultimate homage to the vigilante film. Originally Machete appeared as a two minute short on the Grindhouse double bill but now Rodriguez has gone all the way.



Machete is a sort of cowboys and Indians tale where the cowboys are white racists and the Indians are Mexican immigrants. The plot, of course, is far more complicated than it first seems.

Machete (Danny Trejo) is an immigration officer on the Mexican side of the border, he is one of a kind in that he is honest and does his job with integrity. When he interferes once too often with a drug operation he is brought face to face with the leading drug lord Torrez (Steven Segal) who kills his wife and daughter before his eyes. His career is also destroyed as his immediate superiors are all in on the racket.

Three years later and he is working illegally in Texas. Politics are hot this election Senator McLaughlin is talking tough and working with border patrols to stop illegal immigrants entering the country. But there is a second agenda, McLaughlin and his cohorts are involved in drug importation and with the border closed and protected by an electric fence they can control the drug importation and you guessed it their sup-



plier on the Mexican side is none other than Torrez.

McLaughlin's offside hires a local worker to take a potshot at McLaughlin to make sure he gets the sympathy vote and wins the election. The problem is that he doesn't recent that the man he has hired is Machete and he is set on revenge. Soon the blood begins to be spilt with more slicing and dicing than you can dream of. Machete is out for revenge and won't stop until he can get it.





There are some scenes which could shock and offend, a priest nailed to a cross, nuns shooting guns, and using a length of bowel to jump out of a hospital window.

Along the way there are lots of fun supporting characters, Don Johnson as a redneck border patrol leader, Cheech Marin as the gun wielding priest who keeps digital back-ups of the confessions he hears and Michelle Rodriguez as Luz who later becomes one eye. A nod to the cult revenge film "They call her one eye".

This could be taken as a polemical film, but is really is a throwback to the old revenge films where everything is exaggerated. The Mexicans are violent and out of control, the politicians are corrupt and stupid and the Texans are rednecks and racists. Machete is violent yet the violent are drawn to him like a magnet, this is nearly two hours of over the top gore, bloodshed, action and madness. It is about as perfect as a genre film you can get.

The Blu Ray is as clear as can be, indeed the gore is so realistic you want to look away, but of course you don't. The HD DD 5.1 creates an amazing sound environment which envelopes you in action as well as a truly outrageous cult movie score.



Monsters Magnolia Films Cinema Release

Six years ago NASA discovered the possibility of alien life within our solar system. A probe was launched to collect samples, but crashed upon re-entry over Central America. Soon after, new life form began to appear and half of Mexico was quarantined as an INFECTED ZONE. Today, the American and Mexican military still struggle to contain "the creatures"..... Our story begins when a US journalist agrees to escort a shaken tourist through the infected zone in Mexico to the safety of the US border.



Monsters is an independent science fiction film which has been clearly made on a low budget but is nevertheless quite successful. It is an enigmatic film with a lot of mood and suspense rather than direct horror. There is a strong emphasis on the human elements of the story, the photojournalist and the rich girl and the Mexican's trying to survive until monster attack. It is a strange film in that it is hard to identify what exactly the movie is trying to express, the ending is certainly a WTF moment.

It is possible that it is trying to depict the monsters as peaceful and only attacking in response to American aggression, but it is hard to be sure. Certainly the model of American aggression is also suggested by the huge wall that the US have built to protect it from Mexico





(shades of Israel and Palestine) and the fact that America is constantly bombing Mexico in an attempt to stop the monsters growing. The constant under current of American imperialism vs the alien menace is shown throughout the film and could be interpreted on many levels. At times this post 9/11 theme of pro or anti America gets a bit irritating there has been so many films with this motif that in the end I am a bit over it. At the same time if you overlook any suggested polemic and enjoy it as a solid sci fi suspense movie it certainly works.

Shot with just a five person crew and a cast of two, Gareth Edwards' team travelled through Guatemala, Belize and Mexico, finding and utilizing their locations and supporting actors as they went, Edwards' has certainly created an impressive indie film which uses every cent of its low budget to good effect.



The Open Door Second Sight Films R2 DVD

The Open Door is a pirate radio station that only broadcasts on the night of the full moon. Wherever its signal is directed there will be upheaval, insanity and death. Tonight it is directed at Angelica's suburb.



Angelica is a high school girl with low self-esteem. Her mother reads her email and the messages on her mobile phone, she is grounded and her acquiescent father will not intercede for her with her mother, and even her friend, Staci the school slut, regards her as a joke. She has just met a boy she seems to be able to get on with and she arranges to meet him at a party, but once again Mum gets in the way and insists that Angelica stay at home – she is, after all, grounded for her constant battles with her mother.

Staci sets up the boy out of jealousy and photographs one of her friends kissing him. It looks incriminating and she sends the pictures to Angelica. Angelica, in the depths of despair at ever having a life, is listening to The Open Door. A woman announcer who calls herself The Oracle is broadcasting at the time and is discussing exactly the sort of problems that Angelica is having. Here is someone who seems to understand what she is going through! She rings the

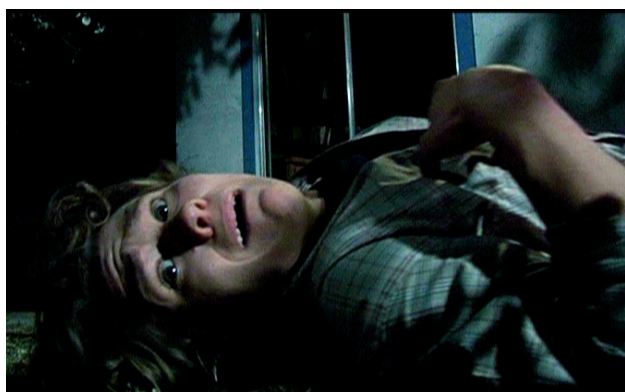




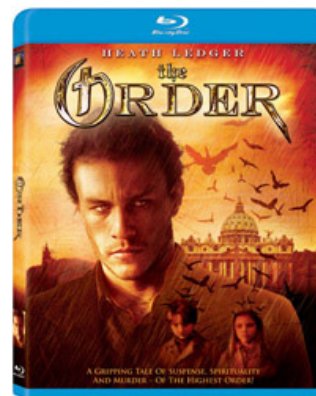
radio station and The Oracle urges Angelica to take control of her own life. What does she really, really wish for? Angelica wishes that all the people who give her a hard time would just go away. The Oracle gets her to repeat an oath and says her wish will come true.

The partygoers decide to go to Angelica's and in their drunken stupidity they try to terrify her with odd noises outside the house. Tonight the terror is directed back at them. Angelica's oath has called into being a demon who will make her wish come true, but the outcome won't be quite the way Angelica wanted it to go. In a terrifying half hour most of them will die cruelly.

The film is a superb piece of horror. The supernatural aspect is there but is not overdone. There are few sympathetic characters and I sometimes found myself cheering as the demon got one, especially Timmy-who-prefers-to-be-called-Spike. Even Angelica, skilfully played by Catherine Georges, comes across as a meek somewhat gutless person – an ideal subject for a demon's influence. Don't do a deal with a demon.



The Order
a.k.a. The Sin Eater
Religious thriller
20th Century Fox
Blu-Ray Region A



This tangled film deals mainly with the Catholic Church's principle of refusing to give the Last Rites to suicides because suicide is a sin. William Eden as a boy used to help Michaelangelo paint the ceiling of St Peters basilica, and was disgusted when the artist was refused absolution by a priest as he lay dying after a fall from the basilica roof. He has become a Sin Eater, someone who will take on the burden of a dying man's sins so he can be forgiven and go to heaven. This makes him immortal. To the Church this is heresy. William has, however, been doing his job for hundreds of years. He is now tiring and would like to hand the job over to another man.

Father Alex Bernier is a priest of the Carolingian Order. The Carolingians, an ancient order, deal with those areas the Church would rather ignore – demons and other Hell spawn – and perform exorcisms. Their work is frowned on by the Church hierarchy as a return to superstition, but the demons are real. The head of the Order, Father Dominic, dies under mysterious circumstances. Bright lights were seen in his room just before his death, and loud screaming. There are strange marks on the body. He had just been excommunicated by the Church for his beliefs so they will not allow him to be buried in the Carolingian cemetery. Alex steals the body and buries it there anyway.





Alex has brought with him Mara Williams, a suicidal artist who has been exorcised by Alex and is in love with him despite once trying to kill him. Alex is developing feelings for her but this is not appropriate for a priest so they stay at arms length.

While searching through Father Dominic's papers Alex and his friend Father Thomas, another Carolingian, find reference to a Sin Eater. The marks on Father Dominic's body correspond to those left by a Sin Eater so they set out to find him. They have an ancient dagger that a friendly Cardinal has given them that can kill a Sin Eater. They visit the "Black Pope", another figure the Church would prefer not to exist, and receive some help. The Black Pope's method of obtaining information is to hang a priest. Just at the point of death the priest can see many things normally kept hidden.

William comes to visit Alex and explains the purpose of a Sin Eater to him. He has taken Father Dominic's sin into himself so Dominic, a good man, can die free of sin. The screaming was William's reaction to the pain of absorbing the sin. William basically believes that it is every



man's right to die absolved of sin. If the Church won't absolve them there is always the Sin Eater. Alex partly agrees, but is in a moral conflict over the teachings of the Church versus the Sin Eater concept. These are further confused over his growing love for Mara. William asks him if he is a priest or a man? If he is a man, the Sin Eater concept is acceptable, as is loving Mara. He offers Alex the job, but Alex refuses. Alex returns to Rome where he finds Mara has apparently taken her life. As a suicide she cannot be absolved and is doomed to hell. Alex uses the Sin Eater ritual to free her of sin then absolves her, but there is something wrong. Had Mara really committed a sin? If not, then she was murdered. Who is behind it and what is their motive?

The Order is an eerie film dealing with strange practices and beliefs. I don't know how much of it is fact or fiction, but it is one of those stories that tie well enough into fact that they are quite plausible. Even so, it wouldn't work without Heath Ledger's remarkable performance. His serious but human approach is perfect for the part and he carries the story well.

For a film made in 2003 the transfer to Blu-Ray is surprisingly well done.

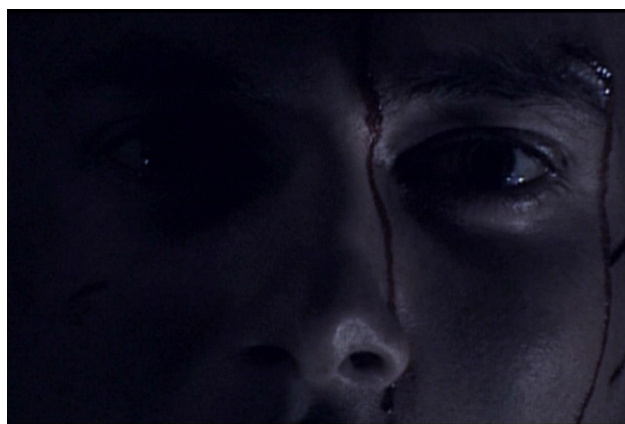


**Philippe Robert's
Resonances
Synapse Film
All Region NTSC**

Resonances is one of those guilty pleasures. While made on a limited income and using incredibly predictable horror themes and motifs it actually works and offers lots of terror and more than a few jumps. Combining B grade special effects that at times make you laugh but more often give you a jolt this is a film which is a strange amalgam of motifs taking obvious inspiration from The Thing, Tremors and even a bit of The Evil Dead.

The film opens in 16th century France, something horrid falls from space and chases a poor peasant girl through a forest from under the ground. She reaches a stone wall and tries to scale it, however soon the unseen thing slams her against the wall and explodes from under the ground in a shower of dirt and grime. We don't see what happens next but we know it didn't end well.

Now we are in modern day France and a gaggle of friends are having a BBQ in preparation to travel to a club in the mountains. They pile into a couple of cars and are on the way, ready for a good time. The character development is rather good, the friends interact well and there is quite a fast paced repartee between them all.



Of course along the way everything that can go wrong does go wrong. As they travel towards the club they hear an announcement about an escaped prisoner. One of the cars runs out of fuel and they push it to a service station which is deserted. Out of nowhere comes a stranger who asks for help, with ill regard for common sense they give him a ride.

As they continue up through the mountains, a thick fog descends and a woman seems to appear out of nowhere (a ghost ?), in horror they crash down a mountain pass. The car sinks into the ground and they get out alive but one of the group is badly injured.

They use their mobiles to ring for help but this has an unforeseen result, the phone signals resonate through the ground and now they have a large but unseen creature from the depth to deal with. Just how many terrible things can occur in one night ?

It is fair to say there are lots of horror clichés on show in Resonances but the strange thing is that they work and work well. Robert's shows amazing aptitude with a low budget and lots of creativity. The Synapse release includes new translated easy to read English subtitles and French Dolby 5.1. and 2.0 soundtracks.



**There's Nothing Out There:
20th
Anniversary Edition
Troma
Entertainment
R0 DVD**

On the surface this appears to be a cliché-laden film, but at 20 years old we must remember that this is the film that spawned many of those clichés. Even with its age, it is still pretty good. It has just the right mixture of horror, comedy and nubile young ladies. Watching the film is a bit like the kangaroo-in-the-headlights thing – you know what's going to happen, but you just have to watch the splatter.

The plot is the same one we have seen in lots of subsequent films. A group of youngsters on their school break go to a lonely house in the woods, unaware that there is a conventional but hungry multi-tentacled flesh-eating monster from outer space roaming the area.

The characters are fairly standard apart from Mike, who is a horror movie fan and can see what's going to happen from his vast knowledge of the genre. When the bushes rustle most people would just blame the wind or a small animal. Mike sees an alien hiding behind the bush. Trouble is, he's right.

The holiday starts off well enough, with the compulsory nude and topless swimming scenes. Mike's obsession with monsters is starting to get



on the others nerves. Even when Jim, the football jock, and his very blonde girlfriend Doreen disappear in the woods with the vacuous blonde, they think he's playing a prank on them. Mike's attacks of nerves and warnings of imminent doom just get him locked in the basement for the night.

Then the monster strikes. We learn useful facts like when attacked, throw a cat at the monster. You then have a monster and an evil cat. Sun-glasses can protect you against monsters who shine lasers from their eyes into yours to take over your mind. Overseas exchange students don't wear bras. You can confuse monsters with lightbulbs. And the most useful tip, if you can get a six-foot alien monster into a microwave you can nuke it until it explodes.

Normally a film like this would just be a hilarious takeoff, but this is the film that the others take off.





It is actually a very good production for its age, well acted and tightly scripted. The girls are mostly suitably mammary-overendowed, the monster is suitably fake- looking, and there is enough blood and green slime to satisfy anyone.

The same can't be said for Lloyd Kaufman's introduction, but he does set the stage for the re-issue of the film. There is an entire DVD of extras including screen test shots and a commentary by the film's producer Rolfe Kanesky. We even get one of his short films included. There is everything here that a horror film buff could possibly want.

**Seeing Heaven
Breaking Glass
Films
R1 DVD**

Paul (Alexander Bracq) is a hustler with captivating looks and a dark gift. His life is a mixture of sexual experiences and psychic visions. He enjoys his work but finds that is haunted by dreams, sometimes nightmares, of his lost twin brother. He decides that the only way to find his brother is to trigger more visions; hence he seeks out more challenging and creative partners. Things begin to take a change for the worse when he finds his dreams turning to



nightmares with a masked killer in pursuit of brother.

At the same time his everyday reality comes to reflect these nightmares as his sexual partners seem to come to reflect the nightmares in his mind. In the end he begins to wonder whether they are connected and tries to decipher which one of them could be tied to the masked killer he sees hence revealing the location of his brother.

This is an provocative film with a dreamlike quality which mixes a highly sexualized view of the world with terror and violence. It also reflects on the nature of the porn industry, male escorts and unprotected sex. At times one is reminded of David Lynch and Mario Bava yet with a strong homosexual charge. This is a gay indie arthouse film which offers an erotic and visceral horror experience.



Vampire Circus Classic Horror Synapse Films Blu Ray

Synapse is rereleasing the classic Hammer Horror films in sets that include both DVD and Blu-Ray. The Hammer films are a good choice. They were professionally made, generally intelligently scripted and well acted. Over the years they covered most of the traditional horror motifs. They were a good substitute for the dreadful "Monster X Meets Monster Y" schlock films coming out of the U.S. Around the early 70s the quality declined as Hammer started to feel financial pressure. Gradually the old hands left the company and new names appeared. Vampire Circus is Wilbur Stark's first production for Hammer and teamed with Robert Young they turned out some quite good films.

Vampire Circus is a typical example of the later Hammer Horror genre. Set in a little village in some obscure part of central Europe, the villagers have grown tired of the Count's depredations on their children and wives. The Count is a vampire, something that the local people have guessed at but been reluctant to do anything about. Finally after a villager's attractive wife is taken by the vampire for his own use and a little girl is taken for food, the villagers have had enough. They stake the vampire and burn down



his castle. Everyone inside perishes, or so the villagers think. Just before he dies the Count curses the village and warns them he will be back and their children will die.

Fifteen years later the village is in the grip of the plague. The roads have been sealed off to stop the disease spreading, but somehow a travelling circus makes its way into the village. Their show breaks the monotony of village life but gradually people begin to die. The circus is managed by the lady the Count took as his mistress and she is now out to revenge the Count and resurrect him with the blood of the villagers.

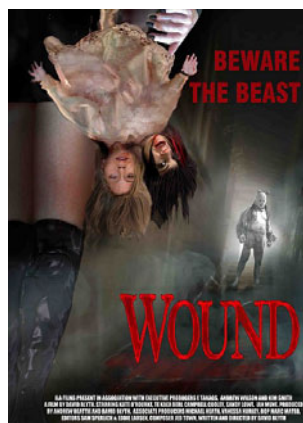
The story has the usual part-mystical scenes so important to set the atmosphere in such films and there is also a reasonable but not overpowering amount of semi-nudity that was typical of Hammer in its heyday.

On DVD the film looks good, but the transfer to Blu-Ray unfortunately does not disguise the fact that this is an older film dating from 1972. Since both versions are included in the same package this is not important. It has been cleaned up and remastered quite well for its age and is a great piece of classic horror.



Wound
New Zealand
ILA Film Productions

Wound is a dark, terror filled film dealing with mental instability and madness. When you add antidepressant drugs and an unsympathetic public to the mix, the effects on the mind can be terrible. David Blyth is no stranger to such controversial films. *Angel Mine* and *Death Warm Up* also covered strongly challenging themes.



Susan killed her parents by burning down their house when she was young. She lost a baby, a result of her being raped, when she was fourteen. She is in a submissive relationship with her boss, and her schooling was a succession of problems including being molested by her father. How then can she kill her father later when she is adult and bury his body in the garden? Obviously Susan's mind, in spite of her medication, is still confused.

Her situation seems to improve when her daughter Tanya turns up, having finally found her mother who gave her up as a baby. Although Susan's mother said the baby had died, here she is alive and well. Tanya takes control of her mother's life and for a while it seems Susan may be improving, but she suspects Tanya may be trying to kill her. Tanya seems to have inherited a few of her mother's mental problems.

Susan is admitted to hospital for further treat-



ment but an unsympathetic doctor believes she is hallucinating about Tanya and arranges to have her sent to a psychiatric institution. Tanya rescues her from the hospital, but that night the ambulance crew arrives to sedate her and take her to the institution. Tanya goes crazy and there is an orgy of blood.

The somewhat disjointed nature of the film at first is confusing. It is full of unlikely events, strange "explanations", and complete inconsistencies. Then we realize that we are seeing inside Susan's confused mind where all things can be explained away, but at the cost of Susan sinking deeper into her illness. She can't separate reality from wishful thinking from madness. There is a strong touch of the need for revenge on those she believed hurt her.

Blyth has given us a film that is frightening in its viewpoint. We are seeing psychotic illness from the inside, and it's not pretty.

Web: <http://www.davidblyth.com/>



Bodyguards and Assassins Pinnacle Films R4 DVD

This is an unusual film for the Chinese. We have come to expect lots of martial arts action, huge casts and somewhat two-dimensional characters. This film does have them but the main theme is about personal choices, not violence.

The film is set in 1906. China is run by the Qing dynasty. Although they are an old tired dynasty they cling to power by ruthlessly suppressing any opposition. They are aided by the British who, based in Hong Kong, want to preserve a stable environment for their trade. A nationalistic feeling is arising in the country, fuelled by dissenters like Dr Sun Yat-Sen. Currently he is in voluntary exile in Japan but he wants to return to Hong Kong to see his mother and meet local revolutionaries. Qing killers will be waiting for him. It will be necessary to protect him and provide a decoy for the attacks that will be directed against him.

Now it is time for the protagonists to make their choices. The Police Chief has been ordered to turn a blind eye on the attacks on Dr Sun. He has to decide between his duty to the British and his obligation to China. A young man, in line to go to an overseas University and eventually to take over his father's publishing business, must decide if this is as important as freeing his country. His is the hardest decision – he will be the decoy. His father Li Yu Tang has donated money to the revolutionaries but prefers business as usual. When he hears of his son's involvement he must decide whether



to allow the youth his own choice of a future. And so it works down to the lowest people. Their rickshaw puller, fiercely loyal to his employer and the son, must decide if he can forgo his impending marriage to guard his employer as best he can. A number of fighting men, down on their luck, have to decide whether to join in as the decoy's guards, knowing they will bear the brunt of the attacks and may not survive. There is just a touch of Seven Samurai here. Even the head assassin has to decide – he decides to side with the Qing dynasty because he does not believe a revolution or closer ties with the British will do anything for China.

If it's kung fu action you are looking for then the first half of the film is going to go slowly as these characters make their decisions and their plans. Each character is given enough screen time to establish his own personality and the film is stronger for this. When the battle starts we feel sympathy with them rather than just regard them as cannon fodder.

There are some quite strong characters, too, like the giant ex-shaolin monk nicknamed Stinky Tofu. You feel sorrow for him as he goes down under twenty assassins, then cheer when he turns up again, badly injured but not ready to give up.

Although Sun Yat-Sen did indeed organize and inspire the revolts that swept China the following year his part is played down. He is treated with respect but the film does not turn political. It is more about the people, not the politicians. It is a strong film for China. They have relied on martial arts for too long and films like this explore new areas for them. In Bodyguards and Assassins they get the balance right.



The traitor Sun Wen left Japan
for Hong Kong yesterday

A Million
Thriller
Korea
Eastern Eye
Madman
R4 DVD

Korean with English subtitles

For a low budget film this is superb drama. It is well acted and produced. The Western Australian outback, where most of it was shot, gives it an overall look that shows the isolation and remoteness that is a strong part of the film.

A group of young Koreans chosen apparently at random is taking part in a Survivor-type TV show. The prize is a million dollars and the setting is somewhere in the remote bush. They are driven to a lonely house in the middle of nowhere. Along the way they pass through forests and desert – if they want to get back out it will be nearly impossible to find their way. The next day the producer explains the rules of the game. One person will be eliminated in each round. There will be no backing out. It becomes serious when he demonstrates what “eliminated” means. He shoots and kills an unwilling contestant with a crossbow and the rest realise that losing a round will get them killed.

The group is a motley collection of personalities, as is usual in these shows. As they are picked off one by one they learn that they must cooperate to live. Finally they know that to survive it will be them against the insane producer. The producer is well prepared for mutiny, with hidden cameras all over the area. The little



group of survivors is demoralised, starving and thirsty. Can they win out and find their way to safety? Why is the producer doing this to them? They obviously weren't selected at random after all. He can't sell the show since it shows him murdering the contestants, so what is his motive?

The producer, in an interview in the Extras, reveals that the final film was nothing like the original plot. As it progressed the script was being rewritten to make it more chilling and darker. It really worked well. The characters are not particularly sympathetic at first, since they have mostly hastily agreed to join the show on the basis of the reward for the winner. Gradually some of them become more human as the pressure builds.

There are a lot of unanswered questions that only fall into place at the end of the film.

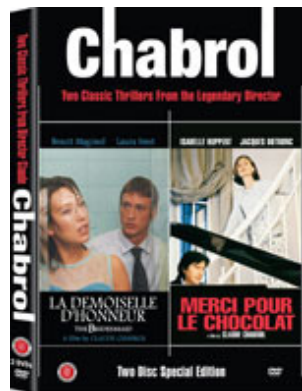


Chabrol
The Bridesmaid and
Merci Pour Le
Chocolat
First Run Features
R1 DVD

Claude Chabrol recently died, aged eighty. His career in film has been compared with that of Alfred Hitchcock and in these two films we can see why. Chabrol did not go for gunplay or violent conflict to build his films. Rather, he built them a clue at a time towards a conclusion that he may even leave to the viewer's imagination. Even when we know who is carrying out the acts of evil we are still left guessing until the end what will become of them.

Chabrol was not afraid to use women as central characters, good or bad, and his films are often more powerful because of this. These two examples of his work have women carrying out crimes that would be more typical of a male character. Chabrol also seemed to like taking a passing swipe at the rich and powerful – they too have their dark, nasty little secrets that are at odds with their role as pillars of the community.

In *The Bridesmaid*, Phillippe, the son of an upper class family, meets Senta at his sister's wedding. He is fascinated by her and that fascination soon turns to a deeper feeling that could be love. Senta seems to reciprocate his feelings, but she is a strange person. Her life seems to be a mixture of half truths, deep emotion and even obsession with Phillippe. Senta sets Phillippe a number of tasks that will show that he truly loves her. The tasks will challenge everything Phillippe has been brought up to believe in. Will he do it for love? *Merci Pour le Chocolat* also deals with dark personalities. Young



Jeanne has ambitions of becoming a concert pianist. She is intrigued when her aunt lets slip that she was mixed up at birth in the hospital with Guillaume, the son of great concert pianist Andre Polonski. She visits Polonski and the coincidences and questions begin to pile up. Guillaume has no piano playing ability whatever, but Jeanne has. Guillaume's dark brooding personality is more like Jeanne's mother and Jeanne's cheerful outlook and determination have a lot in common with Polonski.

All is not well in Polonski's family, though. He and his wife have remarried after his second wife died in strange circumstances. Although she never took drugs she went to sleep at the wheel of her car and was killed when the car crashed. Rohypnol was found in her blood. Andre Polonski uses Rohypnol to help him sleep. He takes it with the hot chocolate that his wife prepares for the family every night. Jeanne becomes more and more suspicious of this chocolate. She has it analysed and finds it is full of Rohypnol. Why is Andre's wife drugging her family? Why is she so disturbed when the mixup of the babies at birth is mentioned?

Then the story turns nasty and Jeanne's life may now be in danger. Don't drink the chocolate !

Although we can often see the climax coming, we follow Chabrol's stories right up to the end. There is something of a cold fascination watching these people sink lower into their own criminal world and wondering if the few good people can overcome the bad. It's a bit like watching a fly caught in a spider's web and seeing the spider approach - the end is inevitable but we keep hoping that the fly will escape its fate.

Chabrol was a good director and writer, well worth being put in the same group as Hitchcock. These stories are fine examples of his work.



**Legend of the Fist –
The Return of Chen
Zhen**
Madman
R4 DVD

*Cantonese and Japa-
nese with English subti-
tles.*



Legend of the Fist builds on Fist of Fury, both the films and the TV show. Chen Zhen was a young Chinese martial arts student who took revenge on a Japanese student who killed their master in a fight at the dojo. He had to leave China so he went to Europe to fight on the side of the Allies with a group of like-minded friends. Now he has come back under a false name. China between the wars was a hotbed of intrigue with warlords plotting for power, rich businessmen with contacts in the triads and tongs running lucrative crime, and over everything was the threat of another Japanese invasion.

Chen Zhen becomes a partner in the Casablanca Club in Shanghai and from there builds up his work to make China unified and independent. The Japanese have other ideas. They want to stir up trouble between the warlords along the north Chinese border to give them an excuse to invade China. Shanghai will be important to their plans since it is a major port. They have a death list of those Chinese in positions of influence or leaders of resistance to the Japanese. When their secret service squads start executing these people by hanging, stabbing or blowing them up it is time for Chen Zhen to don his leather superhero outfit and inspire the people.

He urges the intellectuals and nationalists to escape from China, but many won't go out of



patriotism and others are murdered before they can leave. Finally Chen Zhen is betrayed and captured and must face Colonel Takeshi, leader of the Japanese secret service, in combat. He learns that Takeshi is the son of the man who killed his teacher so the fight is brutal and to the death.

You don't really think of China when superheroes are mentioned yet they have a rich heritage of heroes. Many of their historic superheroes were fighting for the same ideals as Chen Zhen – unification and freedom from foreign oppression. Too many of their hero stories have been hijacked by the martial arts genre and turned into good films that lose the historic and heroic angles in favour of drawn out fights. There are a couple of these long fights in Legend of the Fist but director Andrew Lau has not let them overpower the story. Donnie Yen as the hero may not be another Bruce Lee but he is quite a credible hero and his fight scenes look good.

My only regret about the film is that the politics of the times are not particularly well explained. Chinese politics is a grey area to many people and a little more explanation of China's historical background of occupation and fragmenta-



tion would have gone down well, but Lau doesn't appear to have set out to make that sort of film. There is enough explanation to establish the hero's motive, then he gets on with the story.

It is a good story with layers of intrigue and politics intertwined. It is nicely filmed and tightly directed and has good action sequences. It is a traditional superhero film somewhat in the American tradition, and seen this way it works very well.

The Treasure Hunter Pinnacle Films R4 DVD

How do you classify a film that is a mix of ideas from Indiana Jones, National Treasure, even a bit of Western and Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome? I don't know if the producers set out to make a serious film with historical importance and great characters or just a good rollicking adventure, but adventure is what they have given us.

The plot is not exactly original. There is a lost city in the western Chinese deserts, rumoured to contain huge amounts of treasure. It is guarded by a group of legendary immortal warriors. Their leader, Eagle of the Desert, is selected each twenty years by a fight between the contenders. The loser is banished and sent into the desert to die.

Quiao Fei was the last loser. He survived and



has settled on the edge of the desert where he "confiscates" stolen grave goods from tomb robbers. Between being sent into the desert from the City and settling in his present position he has attended University and learned all he can of history and archaeology.

A group of treasure hunters led by a desert rat named Pork Rib and one of Qiao Fei's old classmates Hua are also out to find the city and its riches. Pork Rib is after the treasure, but we don't know until the end of the film why Hua has joined their group. Hua is the only survivor of a previous trip into the desert by the University to find the Lost City.

The love interest is provided by Quiao Fei's teacher's daughter Lan Ting. She is a writer of adventure stories. She was estranged from her father because he spent all his time in the desert and none at home with his family.

They all find the Lost City and run headlong into the old legends about the Guardians of the city. The legends are real.

The film's reception has been less than enthusiastic, with critics commenting on the lack of character development, some unexplained mi-



nor gaps in the plot and the derivative nature of the story. I can only say they have missed the point. It's an adventure thriller story and the character development is quite adequate for that. The story is derivative, but they have borrowed the best elements from the best stories and put them into a mythology base. It's a bit like cooking – the same ingredients can be rearranged to give a different flavour. In spite of its minor weaknesses I liked the film. It has all the right ingredients but a completely different and interesting style brought about by its Chinese interpretation

**Say Yes
Suspense
Korea
Third Window
Films
R2**

*Korean with English
subtitles*

I started to watch this film quite some time ago, but somehow it got lost and has only now resurfaced. It has been worth the wait. Unlike most Korean films that have a high level of action about them Say Yes is a deeper, darker film dealing more with the psychology of terror.

Yoon-Hee and Jung-Hyun are celebrating their first wedding anniversary with a road trip to a beach resort for a weekend. Along the way Jung-Hyun accidentally backs into a man, M, and they agree to take him to the next town. His brooding presence in the back seat starts to make them nervous. From then on everywhere



they go, every town they stop in, M is there. He becomes more threatening to them and finally kidnaps Yoon-Hee. Jung-Hyun is forced to fight for his and his wife's lives against the insane killer. M is pushing him to kill or be killed – does M want to die?. Finally there is a duel between their small car and a large truck driven by M. The truck crashes and M is finally out of their lives. Or is he?

The film has similarities to many previous films, notably The Hitcher films, but it manages without supernatural themes. It has been reviewed critically for these ideas borrowed from other films but despite the similarities I don't think it loses out at all. It is played simply as one deranged man mentally torturing two innocent people, and as such it stands by itself.

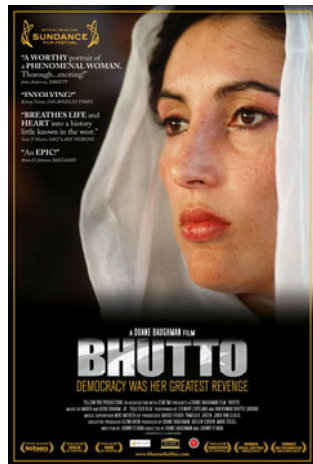
The acting and production are superb, as I have come to expect from Korean films. Park Joong-Hoon is brilliant as M, playing the part without overacting but carrying a lot more menace because of that. For a truly gripping film, try this one.



**Bhutto
Documentary
Antidote Films
All Interactive
R4 DVD**

Pakistan is one of the world's most unlucky countries. Partitioned off from India in 1947 by the departing British in an attempt to cut violence by separating Moslems from Buddhists, it inherited a brace of problems, few resources and a large enemy, India, next door. Most of the population was illiterate and had no electricity or clean water. Under the extremist Islamic law and Shariya system the female half of the population was suppressed. The extremist Jihadi element believed it should extend Islamic rule by force, starting with India and Kashmir. Under these conditions political power was dependent on shifting alliances between the major players and democracy was just a word that few understood.

This documentary traces the development of Pakistan by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and his daughter, Benazir Bhutto. Zulfikar was the fourth President of Pakistan from 1971 to 1973. He was genuinely concerned about improving life for his people, but he had many problems to overcome first. India developed nuclear weapons so the Pakistan military had to have them too. This tremendously expensive program, while successful, left many other problems unaddressed. A military government ruled Pakistan when he entered politics and its loss of a number of minor skirmishes with India rankled with the Pakistani



people. When a civilian government was finally formed Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) won many seats. He made political and military enemies from this, however. He nationalized industries, seized land from wealthy landowners and divided it up among peasants, dismissed over 2,000 public servants for corruption, and refused to support religious leaders' demands for a full Islamic republic. The list of enemies grew. He also now faced demands for independence from some Pakistani provinces. Assassination is a popular way of expressing your political opinion in these countries. General Zia took over the country in 1977 in another military coup. Bhutto was arrested on a trumped-up conspiracy to murder charge and hanged in 1979.

These were the events that shaped Benazir Bhutto's future. She always had a deep distrust of the military and a reluctance to do too much too soon – one problem at a time so as not to disturb people with the speed of change, a lesson her father hadn't learnt. She led the PPP to power in civil elections in 1988 and set about reforms that would benefit her people. She opened more than 48,000 non-religious schools, extended the Pakistani power system to as much of the country as possible, and appointed a Minister specifically to eradicate polio. These gentle reforms endeared her to the people but not to the military. She finally was able to begin empowering women who had suffered under the male-dominated Shariya system, although she followed a number of Islamic religious customs herself..

After only twenty months in office she was arrested at the orders of President Khan on corruption charges. This was a popular way to sideline dangerous political enemies. She was released and won the 1993 elections and again



Assassination



Bomb Blast

became Prime Minister. In 1996 she was again arrested for corruption by the new president Leghari. Her husband was also arrested on corruption charges and spent eleven years in prison, fighting the charges one by one and being found innocent each time. With her husband effectively held as a hostage Benazir entered voluntary self-exile in Dubai in 1998.

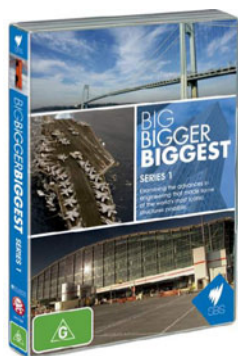
In 2007 she reached an arrangement with new president Musharraf. All corruption charges were dropped and she was granted an amnesty. She reentered Pakistan to a huge welcome from the people. In December 2007 she was leaving a PPP rally in Rawalpindi for the forthcoming election. She was shot by a gunman and the car was blown up by a suicide bomber. A previous attempt on her life had been unsuccessful. This one succeeded. The Musharraf government blamed an extremist Moslem militant group. An Al-Qaeda group claimed responsibility. The crime scene was hosed down, destroying evidence. There were conflicts in the medical evidence. The people of Pakistan blamed the government and went on a massive series of riots.

Now a third generation of the Bhutto family has entered the arena. Benazir's son Bilawal was elected as the PPP's leader. He is only 19 and will complete his studies in Britain before returning to Pakistan. Will he succeed where his mother failed?

The documentary explains a lot about the tortured history of Pakistan. The Bhutto family has done their best to improve the condition of their people, especially in the fields of education and womens rights, but it remains to be seen whether the powerful forces antagonistic to change will allow the will of the people to be heard.

**Big Bigger Biggest
Series One
Documentary
National Geographic /
Madman
R4 DVD**

This DVD is one of the National Geographic catalogue now being distributed in Australia by Madman. It deals with engineers' attempts to build bigger, and the problems they strike when they try. Many attempts do not work the first time but



they learn from those techniques that do and use them to build better next time.

Typically the documentary identifies seven steps forward that make each structure possible. While this is a bit contrived, it shows how a whole series of advances can come together at a fortuitous time to build the structure. An example is the development of suspension bridges to replace stone arches, the development of wire rope to replace chains holding suspension bridges, combined with the use of box girders to produce a lighter structure.

Series One covers bridges, skyscrapers, aircraft carriers and airports. Series Two carries the range further. Each episode is heavily CGI-oriented as you would expect with such a complex subject. The graphics are well done and show the subject clearly, making complex engineering principles and problems easy to understand.

This sort of documentary is valuable. Its balance is perfect. It is fascinating enough to stimulate the interest of kids and get them away from the simplistic rubbish that passes for entertainment today. It is complex enough to hold the interest of adults and teach them more of the world they live in. Top marks to National Geographic.



**Catastrophe
Madman
R4 DVD**

Catastrophe is a informative five part series narrated by Tony Robinson. Originally made by Chanel 4 U.K and shown on Australian television during January, it is available on DVD during March 2011. It is always fascinating to see how science evolves as new information is put on the table.



The original model of evolution was a form of gradualism where everything developed step by step over immense periods of time; minor changes triggered further minor changes until the present was reached. A more heretical school were the “catastrophists” who believed that while the Earth had evolved over vast periods of time, many of the changes which took place were caused by catastrophes which brought about drastic changes in relatively short periods. The second view was not a popular one until very recent developments in technology allowed scientists to undertake research produced new information on the history of the earth and proved just how dramatic its history really had been.

Using superb CGI each episode offers an amazing exploration of a unique near extinction event. Superbly produced combining dramatic footage, re-creations, interviews and experiments this is truly an entertaining and informative series. There are five episodes cover the major events in earth's history.

The Birth of the Planet explores the event which not only made the Earth what it is created the moon. This catastrophe occurred when Thera, another planet on the same trajectory as Earth crashed into us causing the Earth's unique tilt.

Snowball Earth explores a theory which is still controversial among scientists. It suggests that when all of the Earth's landmass was joined and located around the equator an imbalance occurred and the earth ended up covered with ice thousands of metres thick. This was such as



disaster event that only massive volcanic activity saved the planet from total extinction.

Planet of Fire looks at the Permian period. During this epoch some 250 million years ago a volcanic explosion in the Siberian Traps triggered a chain reaction which turned the Earth into a fireball with 95% of all life dying out as a result. Also discussed is our current greenhouse gas emissions which could be just as high as those which triggered the Permian extinction.

Asteroid Strike looks at the disaster 65 million years ago which wiped out the dinosaurs. It shows the research which went into finding where the asteroid hit. Scientists followed a trail of Iridium and shattered quartz until they finally, with a bit of luck, were able to locate the strike site in the Yucatan Peninsula. While this was a disaster for the dinosaurs it did allow the survival of smaller creatures which resulted in mammals becoming the prime species on Earth, certainly good for us !

Survival Earth examines the more recent events which have affected man. These include the volcanic eruption which wiped out most of India's population, perhaps even down to 600 people, some 75,000 years ago. The ice age 13,000 years ago and an asteroid hit in America not long after and its effect on the Mega Fauna of the American continent and the Clovis people. Tony Robinson also discusses possible future catastrophes and how we would cope.

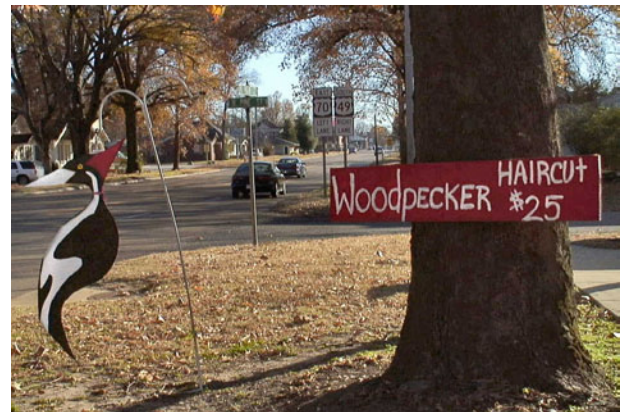
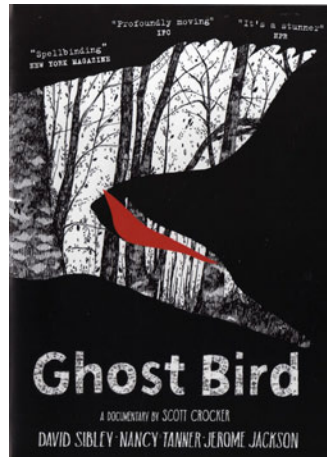
This is a superb series; challenging, informative and bringing together a mixture of presentations with great CGI and intelligent content.

Very highly recommended.

**Ghost Bird
Small Change
Productions
Microcinema
R1 DVD**

The Yeti, the Loch Ness monster, Big-foot, UFOs, and the Ivory-billed Woodpecker all have one thing in common – there is no conclusive proof that they exist. The only evidence in many cases is coarse, grainy photos that have been touted around for so long that have become regarded as proof. Yet much of the belief in them is based more on wishful thinking or profit. This is the situation with the Ivory-billed Woodpecker. Producer Scott Crocker draws no conclusions, but he does present a lot of information and informed opinion from which we can make up our own minds.

This large woodpecker has been regarded as extinct since the 1930s – 1940s. When a sighting was confirmed in 2004 near the town of



Brinkley in Arkansas it set off a frenzy of other sightings, commercial exploitation and wishful thinking. The confirmation was based on the description of the bird – there was no irrefutable photographic evidence, a common failing with this sort of sighting.

Even the famous picture of the Loch Ness monster has been interpreted as a tree branch washed into the Loch. The problem with the woodpecker was its close similarity the more common Pileated Woodpecker. They can be distinguished by the location of a large white patch on the wings (or under the wings in the





case of the Ivory-bill) and other fine body markings that could only be resolved with a high-resolution photo.

The U.S. Fisheries and Wildlife does not control the area where the bird was seen so they were unable to stop the rush of birders and spectators who entered the area. Although there were further sightings none of these were supported by photographic evidence. When the scientists moved in, even their best equipment was only able to obtain a brief (a few seconds) video clip of a bird in flight. They identified the bird as an Ivory-bill and there was great rejoicing, but not all ornithologists agreed. Some believed the researchers had seen what they wanted to see and they prepared a paper countering the identification.

Surprisingly Nancy Tanner, a lady whose husband was an ornithologist and worked on the Ivory-bill in the 1930s (it was rare even then) was not consulted by the experts.



She is the only person alive who has seen an Ivory-bill flying, nesting and feeding. Her husband's black and white photos are a beautifully clear, sharp record of the bird in its normal life. They even took movie footage. When shown the modern film clip she was able say conclusively from her experience that the filmed bird was NOT an Ivory-bill. The area where she saw the birds (five of them) was clear-felled for a soybean field.

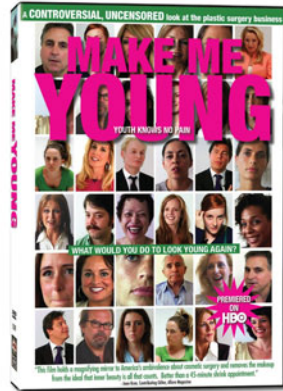
Meanwhile the town of Brinkley was making the most of the boom in woodpecker tourists. Some people went overboard with things like the Woodpecker haircut. One of the more rational citizens is a local tour guide and hunter and he makes the sensible observation that hunters are more likely to see the bird than hordes of tourists. Hunters have for decades been canoeing quietly through the swamp searching for feral deer. They have no interest in shooting woodpeckers, unlike some of the "tourist" hunters who would regard the world's last Ivory-bill as a trophy.

So where does that leave the Ivory-billed Woodpecker? Fisheries and Wildlife has allocated 27 million dollars to save it, but this money has been taken from other conservation programs for wildlife known to exist. Is this just a waste of money?

If the existence of the Ivory-bill can be confirmed conclusively, Brinkley will regain its fame. Meanwhile the Woodpecker remains elusive and Brinkley is quietly slipping back to sleep.

**Make Me Young:
Youth Knows No
Pain
Documentary
Cinema Libre
R4 DVD**

*"Who wants to lose
what you used to
have?"*



This disturbing documentary deals with the anti-ageing industry in the United States. It has always been taken for granted that we will all eventually die, at least in this world, and we are urged to "age gracefully". The anti-ageing industry is making a lot of money by trying to convince us that we may be getting older but we don't have to look like it.

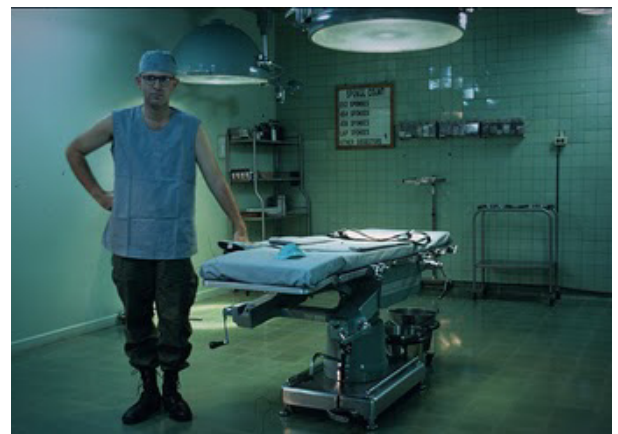
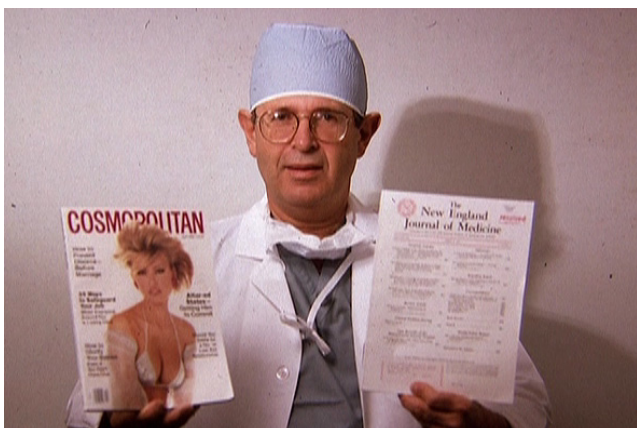
Plastic surgery has been the most common method. Michelle, the narrator, discusses her dad's change to plastic surgery after Vietnam – he was sick of patching up injured men and trying to reconstruct their shattered bodies. When he left the Army he wanted a profession where he didn't have to watch people die. In spite of his career choice Michelle has remained almost completely "natural" and her father never commented about her looks apart from the occasional compliment. She has skirted around the edge of the area but has not become obsessive about it. Less than 50% of graduating doctors now enter the primary health care field. The money is in cosmetic surgery, dermatology treatments and other pseudo medical procedures unconnected with internal medicine. Note that plastic surgery and cosmetic surgery are not necessarily the same. Plastic surgery is a way to correct defects, cosmetic surgery is voluntary alterations to the body to improve appearance.



Plastic surgery has a valuable role in correcting birth defects or accident injuries but it is most often now applied for cosmetic reasons – trying to hold off the effects of ageing and to correct perceived (whether real or not) faults as your body shows is age. These are more to do with ego than medical need but the documentary only touches briefly on ego problems. In some cases you must look "young" to keep a job – it is a matter of your employer's perceptions.

We see Erica Rose, a Playboy model and daughter of a plastic surgeon. The female Playboy makeup artist, herself rather obviously enhanced, says Erica's father has "augmented many of our girls ..." her surgery did a lot for her breasts but not much for her English. Erica herself seems happy with her natural body and observes that *"A lot of people think because you're the daughter of a plastic surgeon you're completely fake"*.

The cosmetics industry has replaced surgery as the major money earner in the anti-ageing field. Gullible people are willing to pay high prices for fairly ordinary products with unproven effects. No matter how scientific they sound none are documented scientifically so all sorts of wild





claims can be made. Some manufacturers admit their products may have little practical value, but if it makes you feel good, where's the negative? To your wallet, perhaps? The cosmetic industry has tried to dignify their work by talking about "the Anti-Ageing Movement".

"Most consumers are concerned by the question 'What should I buy?'" How about "None of them"?

"My fantasy is to go to L.A. and get a big tub of Crisco (solidified cooking oil) and put it into little bottles and rent an apartment in the Valley and then go into Hollywood and tell one agent there's this guy in the valley who makes this incredible cream out of aardvark's testicles" – Simon Doonan, who wants to grow old disgracefully.

"What I see out there in the stores is these increasingly "cosmeceuticals", completely unregulated. " Cosmeceutical is an invented term that implies some sort of medical grade or ability but requires no proof or FDA testing or surgery. One lady points out that you can rub peptides on your skin at \$550 a bottle. It's supposed to act like Botox, but even Botox doesn't work like Botox when just rubbed on the skin.



New methods are appearing, mostly pure quackery. There is Skin Resurfacing, and electrostatic charging of cosmetics – so-called "galvanic creams" for wrinkle removal. Applications of "negative" then "positively charged" cosmetics are charged up by an ioniser that will naturally, reverse the effects of ageing. .

The reasons for the paranoia about ageing are many and often fatuous. We meet a girl who is afraid to smile too much because it may emphasise her wrinkles – she is just in her 20s. Drinking from water bottles and through straws is also blamed for wrinkles around the mouth – there is absolutely no proof of any of these "causes". In younger girls surgery may be used to ease an unjustified perception that they are ageing quickly when they see their first real or imagined wrinkle. What used to be called "laugh lines" are now a major cosmetic disaster and must be corrected at a high cost. Among younger people the reasons seem to fall into two areas – low self-esteem often aroused by media propaganda of what the "ideal" girl should look like, and concern that their unattractiveness may cause future loneliness.





“Being alone” is by far the most common reason given by young girls, since they perceive it will be harder to restart their life at 40 after a divorce if they don’t look younger

There is hope. One plastic surgeon commented on the smaller number of 20-year-olds he was seeing now – most of his clients are older women trying to recapture their twenties. From the examples in the documentary it doesn’t work. No matter how much cosmetic surgery, a forty year old woman still looks like a forty year old. Some surgery results shown are just incongruous on an ageing body – it gives a bony, haggard look. No matter how much you pretend, you are still getting older and you look it.

Cosmetic surgery and pseudo medical treatments are increasingly spreading into the male population as well. “Jack” is proud of his cosmetically modified similarity to actor Jack Nicholson. He is proud of being told he looks like “Jack”. He attracts paparazzi attention and seems to enjoy it. He also finds it attracts women. “Jack” is a rather sad case who needs to borrow another more successful identity to succeed.

The magic word is currently Botox. There are even Botox support groups although the one we see in the documentary is run by a doctor who finds more money in Botox injections than in conventional medicine. The support group looks more like a marketing group for prospective customers. Incidentally anyone with a medical degree can administer Botox.

While the doctor was administering a Botox injection he was also training a dentist who wanted more cash flow for his business.

Men are taking injections as well, but they are more likely to take hair transplant surgery. Gary traces his obsession with surgery back to being a fat kid at school. He still appears to have a self-image problem.

Dermatologists have also moved into the plastic surgery area with non-surgical procedures like collagen injections to pad out wrinkles. Some now specialise in this area and call themselves Cosmetic Dermatologists.

“I like to be around people who think enough of themselves to look attractive” – Cosmetic Dermatologist.

The porn industry has its own obsessions with “young” skin and overlarge breasts - “that 80s porno chic” as Simon Doonan expresses it. A porn actress will use the full range of surgery and dermatology options, to the point that she looks like a distorted caricature of a fantasy woman. Fantasy is what porn is about, after all. Nevertheless with enough exaggeration of the features you can still get a porn job regardless of how unnatural you look. You usually won’t get the job with the body you were born with.

There are surgery addicts. It may not make them look any younger but they feel happier. Sherry, a friend of Michelle’s, is an addict. She has tried just about every enlargement, skin treatment and surgery on the market. She is roughly Michelle’s age but looks much older, fatter and frankly less attractive than the more natural Michelle. Her husband, however, is supportive of his wife’s obsession. Shelley’s biggest concern, she says, is that one day she won’t have enough money to “keep looking young”.

The attitude of these people to those who are happy with their bodies is odd. There is a belief that there is something wrong with you because you don’t want to look attractive (in their enhanced style). The anti-agers regard themselves as normal and the rest of the world as unattractive.

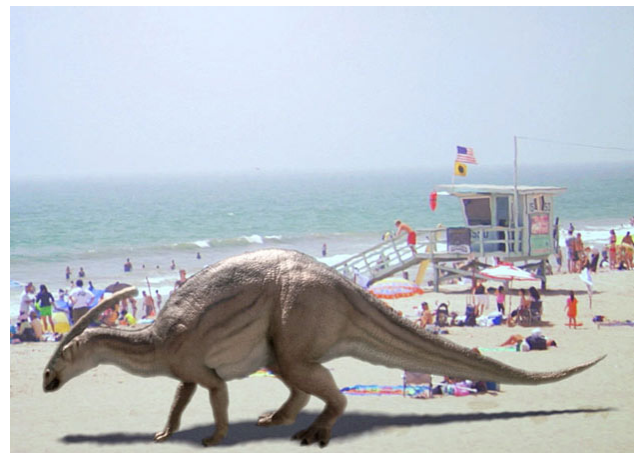
“If you never had any looks at all, what are you losing? The younger girls, we gotta help ‘em somehow” - Sherry

**Prehistoric
Magna Home
Entertainment
R4 DVD (2 DVD Set)**

There are lots of dinosaur documentaries on the market, but Prehistoric takes a unique tack which communicates far better than most. Rather than focusing on given animals or time periods, each episode is focused on a specific American city and traces its unique geography, animal and plant life back through history and prehistory. New York; Chicago; Washington DC; Denver; Dallas and Los Angeles are all covered and offer superb backdrops to these amazing explorations. Cities vanish under the sea, mountains explode from the ground, buildings collapse as new landscapes take their place, this is a series with extravagant special effects. But don't be fooled, the special effects and flamboyant commentary style are matched with very solid science.

As each city is explored we come to appreciate the creatures and lives in their backyard. From thousands to millions of years ago we explore the landscapes where these cities once stood even going back to period when the world's continents were united. A wide range of experts explore the story of each city examining geology, fossils, reptile, bird and insect life as well as, of course, dinosaurs.

Using the resources of each city, landmarks, geological sites, fossil and dinosaur finds, Prehistoric ties in the story of the prehistory of each city with its role in the modern world. The emphasis on "hard" evidence such as geology and



fossil finds makes this a very informative program.

The reconstruction of these creatures is superb and the use of American cities as the focus for each episode is highly inventive. It gives a highly personal feel to the study; it gives it a sense of "place". When you see how each location goes through cycles of being on a mountain top, under water, cleaned by a glacier and filled with all manner of life it somehow relates more personally when you can see the city in its modern context. At times it may seem strange to see the large buildings of Denver, for example, under the ocean, yet it gives a powerful sense of what is being described. How much easier is it to appreciate how deep the ocean is when you see the buildings of Denver underneath them.

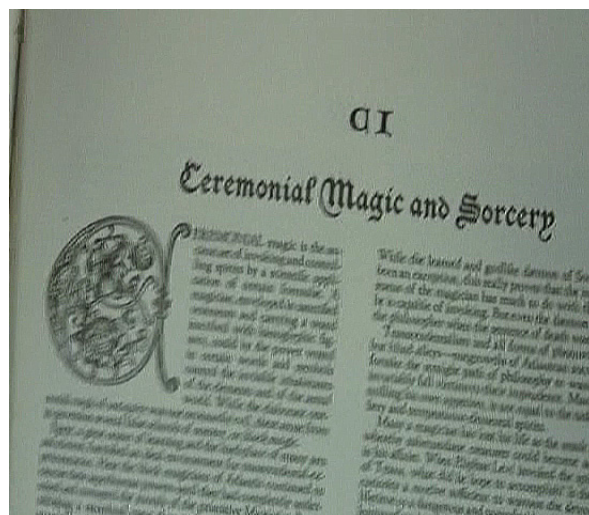
The series explores lots of significant subjects from meteors hits to ancient dinosaurs and reptiles, geological changes to debates about human migrations and dinosaur extinctions. This is well presented series, which offers an excellent balance of informative content with entertainment. It is innovative, creative and will certainly keep your interest.



Sell It To The Devil Tastyland Pictures R1 DVD

Writer / Director David Gaz has put this film together based on an unusual premise – that there are people out there who want something badly enough to make a pact with the Devil to get it. This rather Faustian idea has a basis in medieval history and sorcery, but how will it go in modern-day Hollywood? Very well, apparently. At the audition call a long line of aspiring soul-sellers discuss their reasons on camera. Generally they want fame, fortune and respect. They mostly understand the negative side of the pact. They may become something they don't want to be if the Devil can find a loophole in the pact. After all, Adolf Hitler was certainly famous, well off and respected if disliked for his dangerous power.

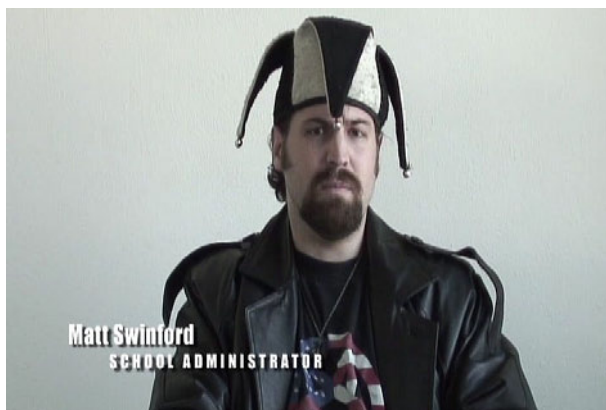
The successful “winner” of the audition is young Kai Blackwood, a heavy metal musician who just hasn't yet had the breakthrough into fame that he wants. Kai doesn't come across as a fool. He is thoughtful, serious and expresses himself well. Whether he takes it seriously or not – well, watch the DVD and decide for yourself. He is made well aware of the risks. A lady at the Philosophical Research Foundation, a free library with an extensive collection of relevant books, points out that selling your soul is really just a way to avoid responsibility by transferring the responsibility elsewhere – the devil made me do it. She also points out that if he goes on with the ritual it will be dangerous. If something



goes out of the ritual circle (the pact) then something will come in (a demon?). There is no escape clause such as finding Jesus and expecting him to forgive you so everything will be all right in the end.

“There are unforgivable sins in this world. I do believe there are things that you doGiving up your mortal soul to the Devil for all eternity for a couple of pieces of silver and a nice car – you've trivialised everything that God gave you. What are you saying to God that your soul is worth?... I do think Jesus has the power to redeem Kai but I don't think he will.” – Father Mike, Theologian

The ritual is set out in an old book “Le Grande Grimoire”. The range of props and accessories for the ceremony is surprisingly easy to obtain. It includes a new blade (a knife), virgin parchment (never written on), a bloodstone, vine twigs and so on. Most of these are available in any good supernatural shop at a shopping centre near you. The ritual must take place in a once-living but now-dead place. Kai picks an





old castle in the desert.

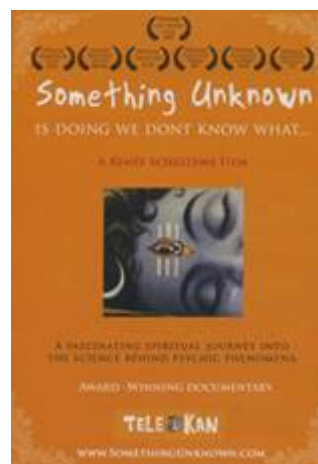
Kai must then spend thirty days purifying himself for the ceremony. This will involve preparing a potion that will help him contact the Devil. He also uses this time to write the pact with the Devil on the virgin parchment. Getting the wording of the pact exactly right is critically important. The Devil is treacherous so there can be no loopholes in the Pact that can be exploited. Kai intends to ask for fame, fortune and the ability to fly, since if he flies he will then know the Pact is valid. Flying is something humans are not really designed for, so his advisors convince him to go for levitation instead. He signs the Pact in his blood. Then they go out to perform the ritual.

Serious supernatural investigation or just a bunch of loonies coming out from under their rocks? Some seem to be a few brain cells short but mercifully they don't spout the new age nonsense about earth forces and the supernatural. They all seem to genuinely believe in the concept of the pact and they help Kai to the best of their ability. Right through the documentary we learn far more about the subject than we really need to know. And what of Kai? Did the Devil accept the pact? Watch the DVD and find out.



Something Unknown Is Doing We Don't Know What R1 DVD

There are lots of films on parapsychology these days and most often they fall in the age category. What the Bleep ? Began the craze and there is little sign of it stopping.



Something Unknown Is Doing We Don't Know What, however, is a more interesting production in that it emphasizes the hard science between psychic phenomenon. It interviews well respected scientists working in the field and considers the peer reviewed and verifiable documentation they have produced. The guide to the film is pioneer parapsychologist Charles Tart and he states that there are five areas in which the sheer bulk of scientific evidence is overwhelming.

These fields are telepathy, precognition, clairvoyance, psychokinesis and psychic or spiritual healing.

The program then examines each of these fields in turn examining the available evidence. Experts such as Prof. Charles Tart, Dr Dean Radin, Prof. Gary Schwartz, Dr Larry Dossey, Dr Hal Puthoff, Dr Rupert Sheldrake, Dr Roger



Prof. Charles Tart



Dr. Dean Radin

Nelson, Dr Melinda Connor and Stephan Schwartz. The evidence presented is solid and provocative. For example Radin devised an experiment which measures eye response to images of violence and suffering, alternating images of pleasure and pain and placing a blank slide between each image. Strangely when images of violence were about to be shown the eye began to response, in most cases up to three seconds before. This sort of documentable precognition is significant.

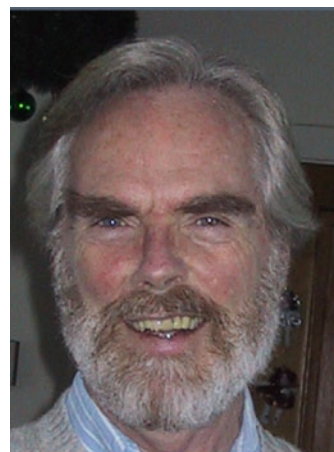
Throughout the show are also individuals discussing their personal "psychic" experiences, while these add a human interest aspect to the film in my mind they take away from the solid scientific foundation of the film. Indeed at times such personal accounts come across as just plain flaky. It doesn't matter who real an experi-



Dr. Rupert Sheldrake

ence seems, if it cannot be proven in an experimental setting it is not valuable to science.

Dr Roger Nelson who runs the global consciousness project also presents a solid case showing how random number generators are seemingly influenced by mass changes in consciousness. For example, five hours before 9/11 random number generators worldwide displayed a clear and obvious movement away from their "random state".



Dr. Roger Nelson

The final aspects of the "big five" spiritual or psychic healing is the most contentious. While there are lots of suggestive cases since psychic healing cannot be repeated in the lab it is hard to truly document these cases. How many of these cases are due to spontaneous remission, medical misdiagnosis or simply psychological illness. I am not saying such occurrences are impossible just that they are far more difficult to document and in my mind this fifth category is far more troublesome than the other four.

Following the final section of the film is a lot of meaningful dialogue and new age content which I think the film would have been better without. The scientific basis for parapsychology is solid but is compromised by allowing new age and spiritual conjecture to enter into the debate.

I greatly enjoyed this film, it placed a strong emphasis on scientific evidence and time and time again brought home the fact that there was more than enough "hard evidence" to convince even the most dedicated sceptic. However there are too many personal tales and new age touches which reduced the effectiveness of this impressive documentary. Good edited could have made this a great rather than average documentary.

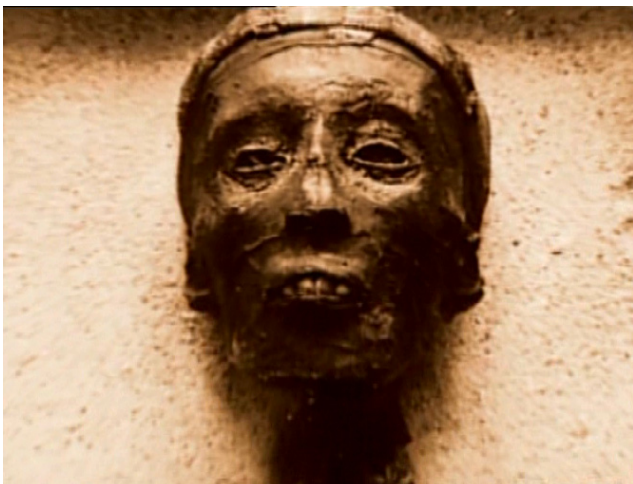
Web: <http://www.filmbaby.com/films/5316>
Web: <http://www.somethingunknown.com/>



Under the Sands: Great Egyptians

Magna Home Entertainment

This DVD set is not a complete history of Egypt, but a series of independent documentaries covering many of the great ancient Egyptians. Along the way we learn a lot about their religion, building skills, history and medical prowess. We also see the difficulties in preserving the country's history. Each episode varies in quality and presentation but overall it is a great and thorough introduction to the world's first nation – state.



Tutankhamen's Mummy

Disk 1

The Mystery of Tutankhamun

We look at the history of Tutankhamun's heretic father Akhenaten, his wife Nefertiti and his rise to power, however brief. There is a strong possibility he and his mother and wife were murdered by vengeful priests who were displaced by his father's religious model of monotheism.

He is of course best known for the massive treasure found in his unlabeled tomb. Despite the incredible richness of the find, it has been pointed out that he was a shortlived minor Pharaoh. Imagine what would have been stored in the tombs of one of the greater Pharaohs?

Cleopatra and the Ptolemaic Pharaohs

Cleopatra was Greek, descended from one of Alexander's generals who was given Egypt to rule. He established Alexandria as the educational and cultural capital. It soon became the knowledge centre of the world. Its population was a mixture of Egyptian, Greek and Roman and Egypt traded with all of them.

Cleopatra fell in love with Caesar and, following his death, Marc Anthony. There may have been a political motive as she wanted to preserve



Thebes Temple

Egypt from Roman conquest. It worked for a while but when Mark Anthony was killed her end was inevitable. She was not trusted in Rome. Her death by snakebite as Octavian entered her palace marked the end of the Pharaohs of Egypt. Now it was just a Roman province.

Sneferu and his Pyramids

He built the first true pyramids after he sorted out the engineering problems. Earlier pyramids had major engineering faults – stepped pyramids and the bent pyramid show these problems. The six largest pyramids were built in a 100 year period and three of them were built by Sneferu. In spite of his engineering and architectural skills Sneferu's first two pyramids had engineering problems. On the third one they got it right.

Two of his sons went on to engineer the new pyramids including those at Giza. One of his sons was Cheops who built the greatest pyramid in the world.

Disk 2 Ramesses

Ramesses the Great was the husband of Neferiti. He fathered more than 100 children. He was a great architect and builder of temples and palaces and statues. (I wonder where he got the time – all those kids!). He revived Egypt's culture into a new glorious age of spectacular public works.

He built Abu Simbel, the world's biggest temple. It was carved from solid rock at the southern end of Egypt as a propaganda reminder of his power to the Nubians.

He almost won the Battle of Kadesh against the Hittites by his bravery in repeatedly charging the enemy in his chariot, but he recognised the superiority of the Hittite soldiers and their superior numbers. The battle finished as a stalemate although it was heralded as a victory in Egypt. He then arranged one of the world's first peace treaties with the Hittites.

Ramesses is supposedly the Pharaoh of the Israelites and the Exodus. The timing of his rule is about right. The Exodus is explained in the documentary based on Egypt's political situation and geography and it makes more sense than the romanticised version in the Bible and Torah.

Hatshepsut

A curious Pharaoh, he (she?) was often referred to in the feminine. She may have been the daughter of warrior Pharaoh Thutmoses, married at 12 to her half brother. He died at 30 after an uneventful reign. This left her Queen of Egypt at 32. She began a building and statuary program that brought Egyptian stonecarving to its peak. She is especially known for the great obelisks. Her Chief Engineer was Senmut. He may also have been her lover. He was accorded many privileges not usually given to a commoner.



Zahi Hawass

For the public record Hatshepsut donned a false beard and male clothing and became Pharaoh. Her stepson Thutmose was a teenager in the army and appeared to be no threat to her but his army training would prepare him to rule Egypt later.

Hatshepsut opened trade with Punt (south Sudan) which increased the country's prosperity.

After her death Thutmose III became Pharaoh. He was a good military man after all his training and Hatshepsut had left the army well trained and supplied. Thutmose conquered territory as far as the Euphrates.

After many years Hatshepsut's name was erased from monuments and inscriptions, possibly as a reaction by the religious powers to remove the thought that they had been governed by a woman. Both her and Senmut's mummies may have been in a cache of royal mummies discovered in the early 20th century.

She was a great leader, a great builder, but a woman.

Amenhotep IV / Akhenaten

He was one of the most misunderstood Pharaohs. Misshapen, ignored by his family, he grew up as a loner excluded from religious events and celebrations. He was the last of six children (the first four were daughters). His mother, how-



Akhenaten

ever, wanted him to be Pharaoh. He became Pharaoh at 18 when his father's health failed. Egypt at the time supported more than 200 gods and their massive parasitic priesthood.

Amenhotep favoured a monotheistic system based on worship of the sun god Aten.

He left the traditional religious centre of Thebes and built a new temple to the sun god further up the Nile at Amarna. He changed his name to Akhenaten and married Nefertiti. The priests at Thebes and Luxor were not impressed, especially when the Pharaoh's generosity was applied to one god only. Although immensely rich they relied on royal patronage to hold and maintain their position of power. .

Akhenaten's physical appearance was unusual. He had long fingers and toes, wide hips, a long face, and a protruding back of the head. This deformity is now known to be a hereditary genetic disorder, Marfan Syndrome, and the documentary discusses this with modern scientists.

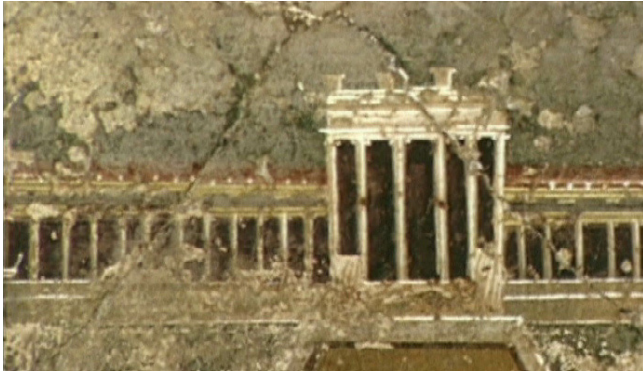
During his obsession with Aten Egypt was being ignored – the army was growing weak and other countries were losing their respect for the Egyptian ambassadors.

Egypt's domination of the eastern Mediterranean was slipping. Secure in his fortress-like temple complex, Akhenaten regarded himself as a god on earth, the personification of Aten.

He died in his 30s and Egypt was quickly reformed by the priests into the old model. Most mentions of Akhenaten were obliterated. He was declared a heretic. He did not go unremembered though. Monotheism was embraced by Moslems, Christians and Jews.

Disk 3 Tutankhamun's Curse

This detailed documentary discusses Carter's discovery of the tomb and the aftermath. The coincidental deaths of people involved in the opening of the tomb became known as The Curse of Tutankhamun. It has since been traced to a mould infection of *Aspergillus Niger*. It has killed many people with weakened immune systems since the tomb was opened. On the tomb walls it looks like chipped paint so was overlooked.



Cleopatra's Palace

The “curse” was largely due to the superstition of the workers and a media beatup by the newspapers who didn't get the exclusive contract to publish. This was sold to the Times to cover some of Lord Carnarvon's costs. The range of “happenings” that followed the opening of the tomb are largely coincidence and were perfectly normal events – Lord Carnarvon's canary was eaten by a cobra, the lights of Cairo failed when Carnarvon died, the deaths of many people through suicide or accident – all within normal statistical probability but interpreted as “the Curse”. Howard Carter didn't die until he was 65, so how did he manage to evade the curse? The Curse is a good story but with no truth in it.

Disk 4

Cleopatra's Palace, Alexandria

This documentary deals with the first exploration of the submerged palace by Franck Goddio. Initially they found the remains of a 30m ship, a grain carrier and general freighter. This was a large ship for its time and an indication of how important the port city of Alexandria was in that early period. The ship also carried many luxury items. This located an area where the palace could be.

There is an ancient description of the palace but the remains of the building are now under 10 metres of water. The palace was destroyed by earthquakes and a tidal wave and swept into the bay. Since the harbour is more than two kilometres across the archaeologists needed a starting point for their search for the palace wreckage. Visibility is around two metres at best but the water is impenetrable in summer when the algae bloom. Using underwater high precision GPS to plot the location of each artifact worked

and they were finally able to map the layout of the submerged city. Goddio was now able to narrow his search to a sunken island believed to be Antirrhodos where the palace was.

The diving team found the piles of a wooden jetty, then Greek columns. They then found a series of over 60 giant columns of red Egyptian granite. Ancient paintings suggest these could be the magnificent gateway to the island. There were huge expanses of limestone paving stones and more columns. Were they getting closer to the palace? Underwater excavations found stone blocks and wooden structures that look like the foundations of a large building. The wood dates to 200 years before Cleopatra's time – the footings of a palace she later inherited. The palace would have been enlarged progressively into her large complex.

The search then turned to her personal shrine, nearer the shoreline. A statue was found of a high priest of the Isis cult, a cult often identified with Cleopatra. They also found two small sphinx statues with Egyptian features. These are easy to date because of their stylistic features – around the period of Cleopatra. Goddio believes he has found the shrine.

There was one final artifact to be rescued – a stone head about three feet tall. It is of the Roman general Octavus, conqueror of Egypt. The whole statue could have stood five metres tall.

Disk 5

The Lost Mummy of Imhotep

This is believed to be buried somewhere near Saqqara. Imhotep built the first stepped pyramid here – the biggest structure ever built at that time. It united Egypt. Imhotep was seen as mortal, but a Sun God on earth.

His tomb is being searched for by Karol Mysliwiec, a Polish academic. He was digging in a disregarded area around the pyramid. He found a cemetery of mummies and skeletons of pilgrims who came to be healed. Imhotep was also a god of medicine. The documentary looks at the medical advances made in Imhotep's time.

Many votive statues have also been found, offerings to the gods. Christianity in the form of the Romans wiped out most of the Egyptian religions. The discovery of the Rosetta Stone

allowed the old hieroglyphs to be read, and the name of Imhotep was revealed once more. There were so many fantastic stories about him that he was dismissed as a legend.

In 1926 the base of a large statue was found. The titles listed on it revealed it was of Imhotep. He now officially existed. The remains of a funerary chapel have been uncovered, a spectacular find. His tomb has not been found so far, but the search continues.

Disk 6

Nefertiti Revealed

The name means The Perfect One or The Beautiful One.

Dr Joann Fletcher is an Egyptologist who thinks she has identified Nefertiti's mummy. She is an expert on ancient Egyptian hair and hairstyles. Wigs were popular among Egyptian women as a way to avoid head lice. She found an ancient wig in the style of the Nubian hairstyles. There is a picture of Nefertiti wearing such a wig.

Three mummies were known to be located in a sealed room off a tomb in the Valley of Kings. She believed that from the descriptions one of the mummies may be Nefertiti. There is no direct evidence as the mummies have been unwrapped and any identification stolen by tomb robbers. She had to identify it within the two hours she was allowed access. Time was short due to the time it took to break down and later reseal the wall that gave access to the mummies. Details like the woman's shaved head and double ear piercing reinforced her belief. These



Nefertiti X-Ray



were typical of the Nefertiti period.

More scientific tests were arranged using X-Rays. Although judging age from an X-Ray is not particularly accurate they showed the mummy is of a girl about 18 or so – too young for Nefertiti. She had six children so she can't have been this young. Fortunately with further detailed X-Rays the human remains experts were able to find evidence that the age was more like 25-30. This was still not conclusive, though.

The face was damaged shortly after burial. The mouth and teeth were savagely destroyed, a means to stop the deceased from identifying herself to the gods of the underworld. Retaliation by the priests for her actions with her heretic husband? There is a stab wound in the side administered before death – probably the cause of death. The wrappings are of high quality, suggesting royalty. The mummy had a bent right arm, the symbol of a Pharaoh holding a sceptre across his body. This established that it is a royal mummy of a female from the Third



Nefertiti Facial Reconstruction



Valley of the Kings

Dynasty, but doesn't conclusively prove it is Nefertiti. DNA evidence may help, but Zahi Hawass believes the technology is not yet strong enough to justify damaging the mummy.

Out of all of the documentaries this showed the most flaws with regularly repetition of video clips and the narrator trivialising the content in a way which is not really suited to his sort of documentary.

Disk 7

Journey Through the Valley of the Kings

There are 62 tombs in the valley (found so far) including those of most of the great Pharaohs. The valley was used as a burial ground for 500 years. It is located on the west bank of the Nile near Thebes.

It was guarded by necropolis guards camped out on the high cliffs around the valley.

Deir El-Medina was the artisans village nearby and not unsurprisingly the home of many of the tomb robbers the necropolis guards were guarding against. The villagers were skilled robbers, though, and only one tomb survived unlooted. Punishment of tomb robbers was severe – beating with a rod, then death by impalement.

Seti I's tomb took 15 years to build. There were sometimes false starts when a tomb was tunnelled straight into an adjoining one or another tomb was found in the same area of valley wall. Their closeness to each other is clearly shown in the computer generated underground maps of the known tombs. The tomb builders did all their work with copper tools, a plumbbob, a string to measure length, and a square. If a tomb was dug deep enough to hit the layer of crumbling shale below the limestone the whole

tomb could be written off after years of work.

The sarcophagus was cut from a single block of granite or quartzite, up to ten tonnes.

Each tomb was painted with all the spells and texts needed to get the Pharaoh to his afterlife. Estimates of the amount of gold in a tomb's funeral goods range from a quarter ton to ten tons, depending on the wealth of the King.

Since most tombs were eventually robbed the priests decided to hide the mummies. The remaining mummies were recovered and buried in a cave outside the Valley where no one would think of looking for them. The Valley tombs were later vandalised by invading armies and tourists.

Now the tombs were open, weather also caused damage. Flooding did, however, cover some of the entrances with flood debris, sealing them again. Some were not rediscovered until Balzoni started searching in the 1870s. He found Seti I's tomb – he was the first visitor since tomb robbers 3,000 years earlier. The tomb is still in remarkably good condition. The paintings are only partly damaged and many Shapiti figures were left by the robbers. These little figures represent servants who can be revived to serve the Pharaoh in his afterlife. They were worth a lot of money in Balzoni's time. By 1900 the Valley was being looted wholesale by overseas "collectors". Only one tomb was missed – Tutankhamun's. It took eight years for Howard Carter to find it. It was buried under debris from a later workmen's village. Fortunately Carter was a new breed, an archaeologist, not a treasure hunter. He detailed and photographed every object in the tomb, so finally the public could see what Egypt's ancient history was like. No new tombs have been found since then.

A minor tomb, KV5, had a hidden blocked doorway. Behind it was found the biggest tomb in the valley – 150 chambers off long corridors. It covered over 3000 square metres.

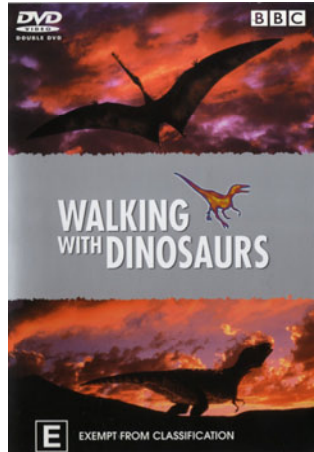
Dr Hawass is concerned about the amount of access to the tombs. The long term effects are unknown. The tombs are now being mapped in 3D on a computer. This will allow tourists to "tour" the tomb on screen, reducing the wear and tear on the genuine ones.

**Walking With
Dinosaurs
BBC
ABC DVD
R4**

In 2000 the British Broadcasting Corporation released a masterpiece documentary that captured the imagination of audiences around the world. Walking with Dinosaurs was perhaps the most ambitious TV documentary series since The World At War and it had the highest cost-per-minute of footage. It was deliberately made in the style of a nature documentary, not a science one.

At this time dinosaurs were a popular topic with schoolkids but serious documentary footage on them was sparse. Attempts to produce animation or film of dinosaurs were patchy, ranging from the “glue some cardboard spines on the back of a lizard” to the cutesy dinosaurs of Disney Studios. The BBC set out to produce a serious documentary presenting accurate depictions of dinosaurs in an environment as close as possible to that of prehistoric times. Surprisingly finding the right background scenery proved to be the easiest part. There are still patches of country that match the fossil records. The pine forests of New Caledonia, geothermal areas in New Zealand, and Nothofagus forests in South America still exist and are close to what the dinosaurs would have lived in.

Animating the dinosaurs was not so easy. Nobody knew what colour a dinosaur was, for a start. The animators had to make guesses



based on what was known of the dinosaurs themselves – a sort of drab camouflage colouring for an ambush predator and so on. Animators are a strange lot and in the Extras disk to the series there is a wonderful shot of a talking presenter being stalked by a purple and yellow checkered Allosaurus. In each episode they managed to “smash” a camera – a loose stone, a dinosaur bite. When a T Rex snarls at a camera, there is a splatter of saliva plastered on the lens.

The animators needed to know how the dinosaurs moved. They had the help of a number of respected palaeontologists to help them. There were surprises. To get a smooth fluid





motion to a dinosaur's movement the fossil bones were digitised and assembled on computer. In some cases the dinosaurs could not have moved in the accepted way because the articulation of their bones simply didn't allow it. A dinosaur with a long neck could not have grazed on tree leaves if its neck bones couldn't get its head high enough. Instead it would have to have used its long neck to graze off bushes and small plants with the minimum of effort, sort of vacuum cleaning its way across the ground. Where a closeup was needed a suitable model was made up and animated by the Disney method of "animatronics". Often a dinosaur's actions had to be based on those of similar modern animals.

When the animated dinosaurs were placed on their appropriate background scenery the results were simply stunning. Each of the six episodes covers a particular type of dinosaur from the huge land animals to the "set of teeth with fins" marine reptiles to the great flying dinosaurs. The dinosaurs were not given cute names (except, of course, by the animators and production staff). The stories were told in a straightforward, factual manner and not romanti-



cised or dumbed down. Kenneth Branagh's beautiful narration gives the series a certain authority carried best by the British accent. When the series was shown on the U.S. Discovery Channel it was renarrated by Avery Brooks. I have heard from Americans that his slightly "Oh, Wow" presentation did nothing for the series. If there is any emotion in the series it is Episode 6, Death of a Dynasty. In this we see the great dinosaurs under increasing pressure from volcanism. Eggs are infertile and food is becoming scarce. Finally they become extinct when a giant asteroid slams into the Earth, triggering what is called the K-T Event. Or do they become extinct? We see the last survivors of the dinosaurs, the birds, and a new range that will inherit the earth, the mammals.

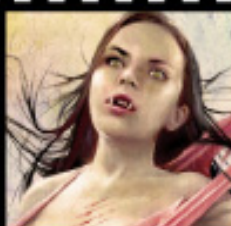
The series set a new standard for dinosaur recreations. There were a few follow-up series in the "Walking With ..." range, but the dinosaurs appeared in more documentaries now that the practicalities had been worked out. Unfortunately not all the documentaries went anywhere near the same standard. Quite recently a U.S. series was issued that purported to show what major cities like New York would have looked like in the dinosaur period. A dinosaur walking down a New York street? The less said the better.

There was some criticism that the documentary included some scientific theories that were unproven in the geological record. In the U.S. a scene showing a young dinosaur being devoured by predators was cut. These are minor complaints, though. For general accuracy of content, visual appeal and sheer scientific interest I think this is one of the best documentaries ever made. The BBC is currently working on a remake of the series. It will probably first be shown as a full length film in 2012.

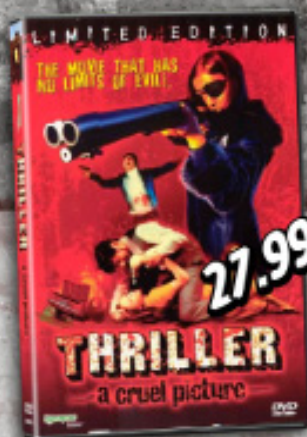


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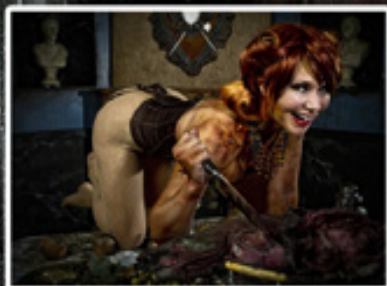
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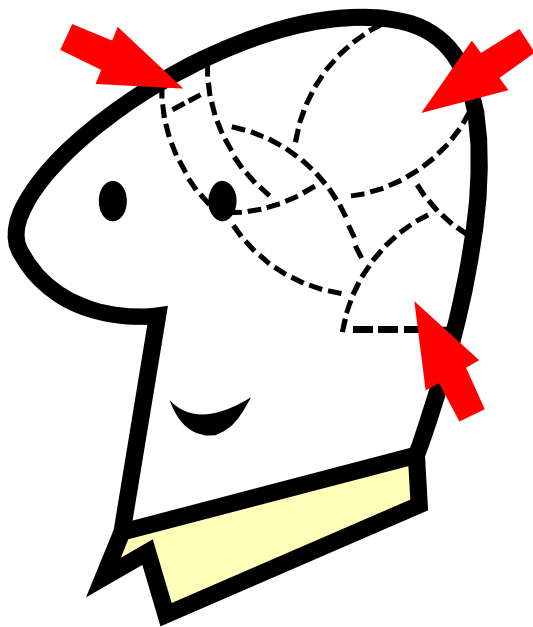
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